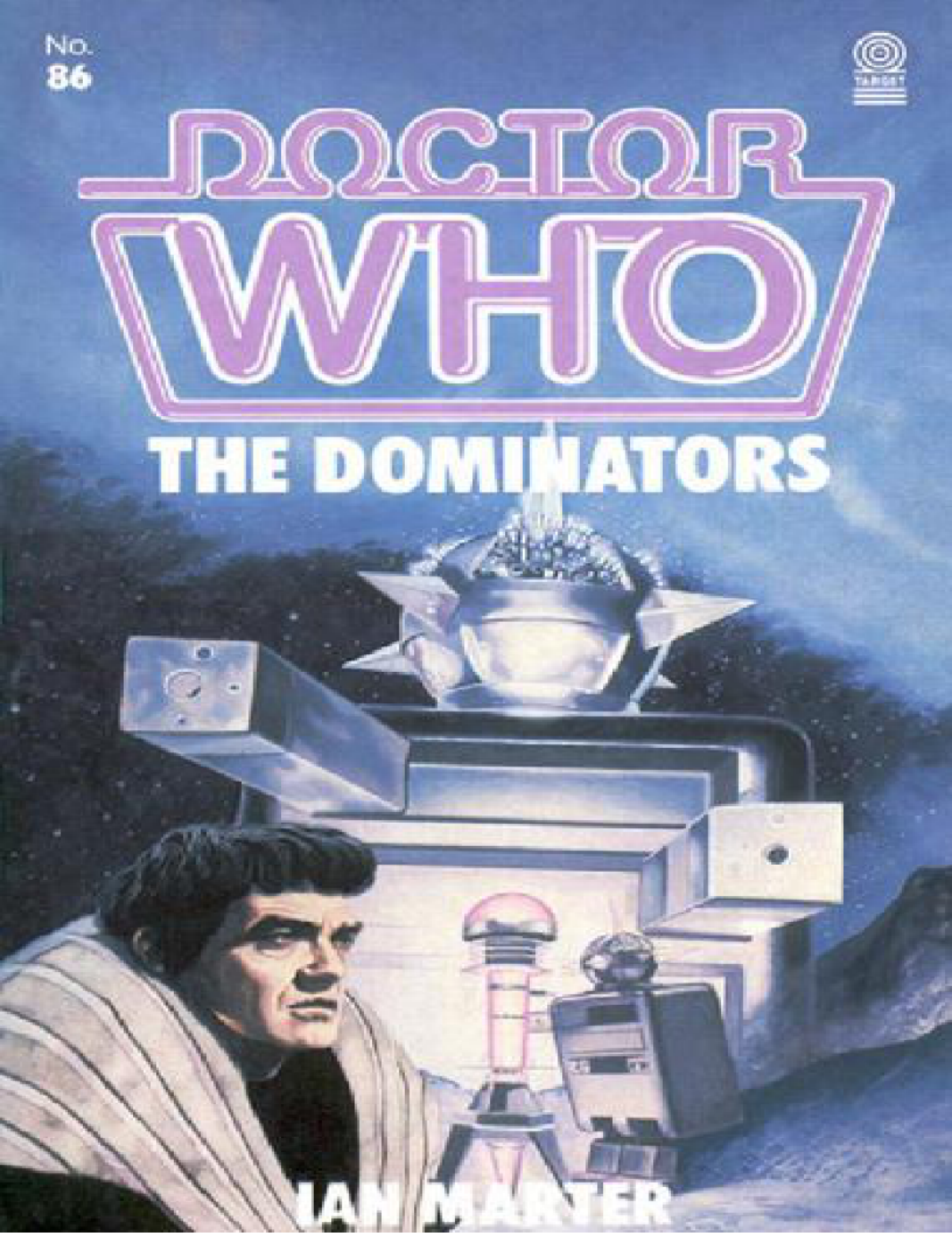
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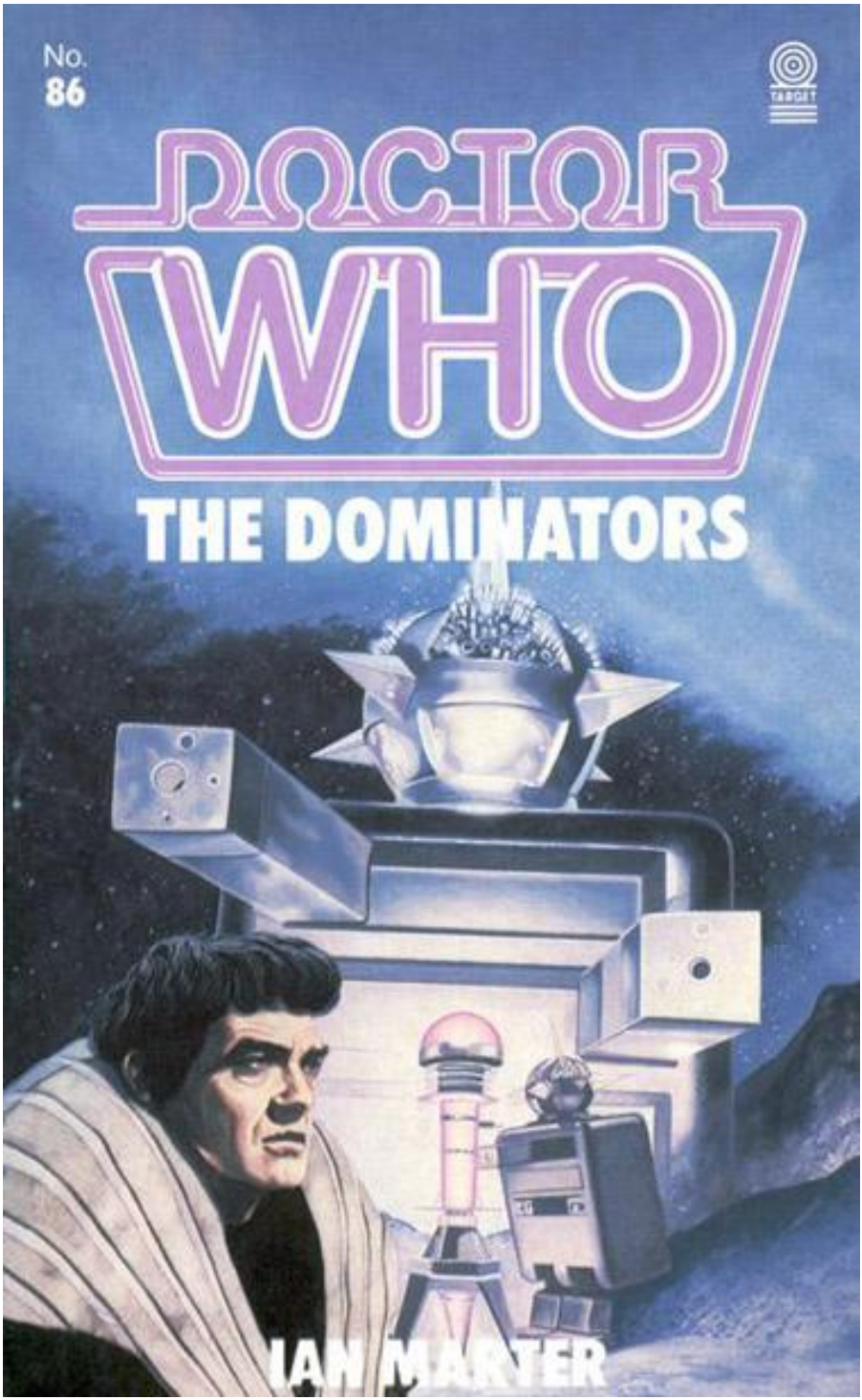

The Doctor remembers Dulkis from a previous visit as a civilised and peaceful place. But times have changed, and his second trip is not

quite the holiday he was expecting.

The Dulcians themselves are more reluctant than ever before to engage in acts of violence.

The so-called Island of Death, once used as na atomic test site, has served as a dire warning to generations of Dulcians of the horrifying consequences of warfare. But an alien race prepares to take advantage of their pacifism . . .

The whole planet and its passive inhabitants are threatened with complete annihilation – and no one, it seems, is going to lift a finger to stop the evil Dominators and their unquestioning robot slaves.

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Science Fiction/TV tie-in

DOCTOR WHO

THE DOMINATORS

Based on the BBC television serial by Norman Ashby by arrangement with the British Broadcasting Corporation **IAN MARTER**

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1

Island of Death

A huge crescent of brilliant pinpoints of light sliced through the unimaginable emptiness of space near the edge of a remote spiral galaxy. Like a colossal scimitar, it flashed in a relentless sweep towards an insignificant little planet which orbited a isolated minor star. Suddenly the very tip of the point of the crescent separated itself from the rest. It decelerated into a right curving path which gradually spiralled closer and closer to the pale, ochre-coloured planet. Far above, the gigantic blade of lights swept on through the galaxy, leaving the meteor-like object to burn its deadly way down through the hot dry atmosphere towards the barren waste shimmering below.

A vicious whirlwind of sand and rock splinters was sucked into the air around a vast dune-covered basin at the foot of rugged sandstone cliffs. A sickening throbbing sound sheered through the dense clouds as an enormous circular shadow darkened the swirling hollow. Slowly a massive silver disc descended and hovered a few metres above ground. Its upper surface was a shallow dome with cowlings radiating from the centre like flattened tubular spokes. A band of circular ports pulsated in rapid sequence round and round the rim, giving the impression that the saucer was rotating as it slowly gyrated and steadied itself while emitting a piercing rhythmic whine. After a few seconds, a broad silver shaft emerged from the underside and extended itself to the ground forming a central support.

For several minutes the whirlwinds raged around the weird craft and the oscillating whine reached a deafening climax. Then gradually the noise decreased, the pulsation of the rim slowed and stopped, and the shrieking sandstorm subsided. An eerie silence enveloped the giant metallic mushroom as the thick dust settled and the ground ceased to tremble. Then from far in the distance came the faint sound of waves monotonously breaking. For a while nothing happened.

All at once a curved panel at the base of the central shaft hummed smoothly open and something stirred in the dark interior. Two massive figures strode menacingly into the hot air. They were human in form but towered more than two and a half metres in height. Their

leathery features were starkly chiselled, with thin bloodless lips and deeply set red-rimmed eyes which burned with a cold green light beneath heavy brows. Their short hair was black and sleeked back, like a skullcap, from their shallow foreheads.

The creatures were clad in protective suits consisting of black quilted material like rubber, armoured with small overlapping plates and built up around the shoulders so that they appeared to have no necks. Massive boots encased their long thick legs and their hands were concealed inside huge padded gloves which creaked when they moved their fingers.

The two figures stalked cumbersomely around under the saucer, surveying the arid landscape with piercing emerald stares.

'Is flux absorption complete, Toba?' one of them suddenly rapped in a hard imperious voice.

The other checked a small instrument he was carrying.

'Affirmative, Navigator Rago,' he announced. 'Energy now transferred to fuel fields. But we require much more.'

Rago waved his big arm impatiently. 'That is the purpose of our visit, Probationer Toba.'

Like two giant turtles on their hind legs, the figures marched slowly through the soft sand.

Toba glanced sideways at his superior.'With respect, I still submit that we should continue to Epsilon Zero Gamma. This planet has not been fully evaluated...'

Rago drew a hissing breath and his eyes reddened. 'This planet is ideal,' he retorted sharply. 'At this location, crust parameters are optimum. Also an intelligent life-form is present.'

'But the species might be unsuitable,' Toba objected. 'It might be hostile.'

Rago's gloves creaked ominously. 'If necessary we shall destroy it, Toba.'

A trace of a ghastly smile buckled Toba's iron features.

'Yes we shall destroy...' he rasped eagerly.

Rago glared contemptuously at his subordinate.

‘Commence the preliminary survey at once,’ he ordered.

‘Command accepted,’ Toba replied submissively.

Turning towards the dark hatchway at the foot of the shaft he rapped out a harsh summons: ‘Quarks!’

lnstantly an excited whirring and chattering sound issued from within, a noise that was part human and part mechanical. Something glinted and sparked in the shadows. And then the Quarks emerged...

On the far side of the parched plateau stretching back from the ridge of sandstone cliffs, lay a vast grey sea covered with a smoky mantle of fog. Across the gently heaving, murky water a large hovercraft shaped like a flat beehive was gliding towards the shore. Its hull was composed of concentric rings rising from a broad base and tapering to a small dome and several faintly illuminated panels glimmered around its middle ring. Otherwise the vessel was featureless, looming through the cloud with a low-pitched grinding sound.

In the cool, softly lit interior, four people were lounging in padded seats set in a semicircle around a well-worn instrument console. They were staring up at the large display-screen at an angle above them, which showed a clear image of the approaching land, while through the observation ports the thick vapours writhed and swirled outside. The four travellers – three male and one female –

wore sleeveless garments like togas, cut low around the neck but with curiously bulging pleated waists. Their legs were bare and their feet were clad in thong sandals reaching to their ankles.

A slender but athletic young man with fine bronzed features and wavy blond hair turned to his companions with a smile. ‘This really is a terribly primitive way to travel,’ he exclaimed.

‘Well, we wanted some excitement for a change didn’t we, Tolata?’ replied a second youth with dark curly hair, turning to the beautiful fair girl beside him.

Tolata nodded eagerly. ‘An adventure. That is why I came, Etnin.’

The blond youth gestured round the shabby cabin.

‘Excitement? What’s exciting about sitting for hours in this obsolete

old tub?' he demanded. 'In a capsule we'd only have taken a few minutes.'

Just then the fourth traveller – a short balding man with a plump body and a mischievous expression – sprang up to adjust some controls. 'Not without a permit, Wahed!' he retorted. 'You seem to forget... all this is extremely illegal.'

At that moment the craft shuddered and lurched violently from side to side. The helmsman smiled at his passengers' gasps of dismay. 'You can hardly complain.

You've travelled hundreds of kilometres by sea with a real live navigator...'

The vessel lurched again

'Well, Kully, perhaps that does add a little zest,' Wahed admitted doubtfully.

Kully gestured up at the scanner. 'The Island of Death!'

he announced dramatically. 'Uninhabited for 170 annos.

Nothing could survive in this poisoned wasteland...'

The passengers stared at the brownish coastline and distant cliffs. There were no signs of life of any description.

Eventually Wahed shrugged. 'It's not so impressive.

There's a regular visit by the Monitoring Unit and...'

'And sometimes Students are allowed to see the effects of atomic radiation there...' Tolata added, her large blue eyes wide with fascination.

Kully snorted dismissively and jiggled his controls. 'But all that's organised by the Council,' he cried. 'This is the *real thing*!'

Wahed frowned at the screen. 'It looks like the images on my video at home,' he objected. 'You could be cheating us, Kully.'

Kully shook his pinkish round head impatiently. 'This is real. You're actually here,' he protested.

Etnin rose to his feet. 'Why don't we land on the Island... and see for

ourselves?' he suggested in a hushed voice. Kully stared at him in horror. 'You can't.'

'Whyever not?' demanded Wahed, standing up on. the other side of their perspiring little guide.

'Yes. Why not?' Tolata joined in excitedly.

Kully gripped the control console and swallowed nervously. 'Without proctective suns.' he murmured. 'It would be madness.'

At that moment, warning systems started buzzing and flashing urgently.

Kully went pale. 'Radiation hazard... Radiation...' he stammered, gazing in panic at his instruments.

Suddenly they were thrown violently sideways.

'Kully... do something, Kully...' Tole. screamed as the ship swung abruptly to and fro and than shuddered to a stop, its propulsion systems grinding in protest.

Kully struggled to regain control, but the systems whined and squealed uselessly. The craft would not move.

'We've run aground,' he admitted in a whisper. 'The drives are completely stuck.'

There was an appalled silence.

'You mean permanently?' Wahed asked uncertainly.

Kully nodded miserably, falling back into his seat and covering his face in his hands.

'This certainly is exciting!' Ernie murmured, clutching Tolata's arm nervously.

'Running aground on radiation-contaminated islands isn't my idea of excitement" Kully wailed.

Suddenly Wahed pointed to the instruments. 'Look, the radiation detectors are indicating zero!' he exclaimed.

Kully peered through his stubby fingers. 'Zero? But they can't be.'

‘So much for your real live navigation,’ Wahed laughed.

He turned to the others. ‘Wherever we are, this can’t be the Island of Death,’ he scoffed.

Kully roused himself and thumped the console. The detectors continued to register zero radiation. ‘It must be a malfunction,’ he protested defiantly.

Behind his back, Wahed had reached across and craftily operated a series of switches.

‘Hey, what do you think you’re doing?’ Kully shouted angrily as a hatchway rumbled slowly open somewhere in the vessel.

Wahed grinned. ‘Let’s go and see where we *really* are,’

he suggested mischievously.

Kully stared at him incredulously. ‘Go out there?’ he echoed. ‘But you’ll all be cooked to a frazzle in seconds!’

Ignoring him, Wahed gestured to Tolata and Etnin to follow and walked fearlessly out of the cabin.

For a moment Kully could only watch in horrified silence as Etnin disappeared after him. Then his shiny face puckered with rage. ‘Don’t complain to me if you all kill yourselves,’ he shouted, ‘because I don’t refund money to...’ He clutched his sparse hair in panic. ‘Refund? What am I saying’ You haven’t paid me yet. Come back!’

He darted forward and seized Tolata’s arm as she was about to follow the others. ‘Don’t he a fool. This is the Island of Death!’ he screamed. ‘The detectors are malfunctioning...’

The tall girl shook herself free, reached the hatchway and jumped elegantly down into the shallows. ‘You are a rogue, Kully!’ she cried setting off eagerly up the beach through the thinning mist. ‘This can’t be the Island of Death.’

‘I tell you it is!’ Kully yelled after her. ‘And I must insist that you pay me the agreed price...’

Just then, Wahed appeared over some nearby dunes and ran down towards them. ‘People... up by the cliffs!’ he shouted v triumphantly.

‘That settles it, Kully,’ Tolata said over her shoulder.

‘There would be no people on the Island of Death ‘

‘Only the Monitoring Unit,’ Kully gasped, cowering in the hatchway as Wahed splashed towards him.

‘The two I just saw are not wearing radiation suits,’

Wahed retorted smugly.

Suddenly Etnin appeared, waving his arms excitedly.

‘They’ve got robots with them!’ he cried.

Reaching up, Wahed grabbed Kully’s pudgy hand and pulled him into the shallows. ‘Robots,’ he exclaimed.

‘Come on, Kully, perhaps we can persuade them to assist us.’ Dragging Kully behind him he set off towards the dunes.

Kully glanced back at his marooned ship listing drunkenly in the soft sand. ‘Robots!’ he muttered scornfully and stumbled reluctantly afrer the others.

Beyond the dunes, at the four of the towering cliffs near the saucer, two Quarks were being programmed by Probationer Toba. Each Quark stood about two metres tall.

It consisted of a squat ‘body’, like a heavily armoured box mounted upon two stout extendable ‘legs’ and surmounted by a large spherical ‘head’. This head was covered with a network of eyes and sensors, and resembled a crystal-studded ball. From it protruded five antennae shaped like elongated glass pyramids – one each side, front and back, and the fifth projecting vertically from the crown. For

‘arms’, each Quark possessed two extendable probes hinged across its ‘chest’ and ending in a complex ‘hand’ bristling with sensors, sockets and implements.

The robots acknowledged Toba’s instructions with a continuous metallic chuckling sound, eerily resembling the laughter of small children. Around their sharp-edged and pointed antennae, the air buzzed and crackled menacingly.

‘Drilling targets will be established at the five vector nodes and depth parameters calculated for each target...’

Toba ordered.

Suddenly o of the Quarks emitted a vicious sparking between the points of its antennae. Toba wheeled round and saw three distant figures running across the dunes towards the saucer, shouting and gesticulating. He watched them impassively fora moment and then a kind of smile cracked around his hard mouth. He glanced furtively towards the saucer and then rasped out an order. The Quarks immediately turned, deploying their probes and aiming at the approaching figures.

'Destroy them.' Toba hissed, in obsessive whisper.

There was a brief wailing and bleating sound, followed bya series of whiplike cracks as bolts of ultrasonic energy burst simultaneously from the Quarks' probes. Wahed, Tolata and Etnin were flung into the air like helpless puppets before collapsing in shapeless broken bundles in the sand. 'Recharge force units!' Toba rapped, licking his thin dry lips with relish.

The Quarks chuckled harshly in anticipation.

'Is there trouble, Probationer Toba?'

Toba started guiltily as Rago strode out of the access hatch at the base of the shaft.

'I have dealt with three alien beings, Navigator Rago,'

he reported, smartly recovering his composure.

'Dead?'

'Affirmative.'

Rago strode menacingly over to him. 'That was unnecessary, a waste of vital energy reserves,' he hissed.

'Resume your proper functions immediately.'

'Command accepted,' Toba acknowledged. His eyes glowered with resentment and he resolved to avenge his humiliation as he watched Rago marching off to examine the remains of his victims.

Some distance along the wandering ridge of the sand-cliffs, Kully lay among some boulders, paralysed with horror at what he had just witnessed and stunned by his miraculous escape. Now he was stranded on the Island, alone and defenceless against an unknown

enemy.

Eventually pulling himself together, he massaged the wrenched ankle that had made him tall behind the others –

ironically, saving his life – and tried to think.

All at once the rocks started trembling and clattering together around him. Holding his breath, he listened as a screeching and groaning rose from somewhere below him.

Then he scrambled to his feet and frantically clawed his way up the cliff-face whimpering with terror.

Below, a shabby, rickety structure topped by a flashing yellow beacon gradually became visible against the cliff.

After a few seconds the beacon stopped flashing, the ground ceased to vibrate and there was silence...

After a while the door of the police public call-box creaked open and a short dark-haired little man ambled out, yawning and sleepily rubbing his eyes. He was wearing grubby checked trousers, a kind of frayed frock-coat and a threadbare and none too clean shirt, with a bootlace tie negligently knotted under his jutting chin. His shoes were scuffed and down-at-heel and his manner was carefree and unassuming. Stretching, he shook himself and looked keenly around with dark humorous eyes, sniffing at the air expectantly.

'Ah yes...indeed yes...' he muttered happily.

'Are ye all right, Doctor?' demanded a gruff Scots voice as a tough-looking young lad dressed in a kilt complete with sporran, sleeveless furry jacket and knee-length socks with heavy boots emerged behind him, brandishing a folded deckchair.

'Just a little tired, Jamie,' the Doctor replied. 'Mental projection can be an exhausting business, you know.'

Behind Jamie, a lively teenage girl with a round face and short black hair dressed in slacks and a tee-shirt peered round the police-box door. 'You need a rest, Doctor,' she announced firmly.

'My dear Zoe, we all do,' the Doctor agreed. 'That's precisely why we came to Dulkis. This is a splendid little planet.' He took the deckchair from Jamie and set it up on the sand.

Jamie grunted sceptically. ‘Och, we’ve heard that one before.’

‘You mean there won’t be any Cybermen or Daleks?’

Zoe complained, wrinkling her nose in disappointment as she stared around them. ‘Is the whole planet as dreary as this?’

The Doctor settled himself comfortably in the deckchair. ‘Dear me, no,’ he chuckled patiently, ‘this is just a small island. The main cities are quite extraordinary and you’ll find the Dulcians are an extremely advanced people, gentle and friendly and very...’

A tremendous explosion drowned the rest of the Doctor’s words. He leaped out of the deckchair, which collapsed in a heap.

‘Whatever was that?’ exclaimed Zoe, covering her ringing ears.

‘It came frae over this way!’ cried Jamie,running off along the base of the cliff.

The Doctor and Zoe set off in pursuit. Eventually they came upon the wreckage of a low L-shaped building, half buried in the sand in a kind of horseshoe indentation in the chff. Shattered concrete slabs and twisted metal framework were scattered everywhere. A gaping hole in one wall held charred window frames and the remains of a heavy door.

‘What were you just saying about the gentle, friendly Dulcians, Doctor?’ Zoe teased as they surveyed the ruin.

‘But that explosion couldna have caused all this...’ Jamie observed.

The Doctor frowned and deep lines formed at the corners of his nose and ran down each side of his mouth.

He picked up a fragment of concrete and crumbled it thoughtfully. ‘Quite right, Jamie. All this happened many years ago,’ he murmured. ‘Probably the result of an atomic explosion...’

Jamie and Zoe exchanged anxious glances as the Doctor cautiously approached the dark hole and ventured inside the ruin. With the recent detonation still throbbing in their ears, they tentatively followed.

‘I just don’t understand it...’ the Doctor was muttering as he peered around. Against the walls stood large display-cabinets made of a kind

of thick perspex material, dusty but completely undamaged. They contained all kinds ofsophisticated devices, some of which were obviously very old, while others looked new and unused.

'Looks like some kind of museum,' said Zoe, wandering through the gloom and round the angle into the shorter arm of the building.

'Exactly. A war museum,' agreed the Doctor.

Jamie had lifted a slim rifle like weapon out of its case and was squinting into its electronic sight. 'But you said the Dulcians were a peaceful lot, Doctor,' he protested, waving the gun carelessly about.

'Oh, these are very ancient weapons,' the Doctor explained. 'They banned these gadgets decades ago.'

At that moment an intense beam of energy shot across the building and, with a crack, punched a hole in the remains of the door.

'Careful Jamie,' the Doctor yelled, lunging forward and snatching the deadly laser from him.

Jamie went pale and giggled nervously as the Doctor replaced the thing gingerly on its stand. Then a fearful shriek made them both spin round.

'Zoe...!' the Doctor cried, rushing across to the right-angled corner of the building with Jamie at his heels. Zoe came towards them in the half-light, backing slowly away from a spine-chilling scene at the far end of the room. Four figures were seated around a circular table, their bodies frozen into grotesquely contorted positions. Their clothing was charred and rotten, here and there fused into a glassy lump with their roasted and flayed flesh. The eyeless faces were burned beyond recognition.

Jamie put his hand to his mouth. 'What... what happened to them?' he gasped, his stomach rising.

Signing to his young companions to stay put, the Doctor slowly approached the nightmarish tableau. Then as he drew near he began to shake with laughter. 'Oh dear me...' he chuckled, shaking his head. 'Of course... of course...' He beckoned them over.

Zoe and Jame stared at each other in astonishment and then reluctantly crept forward. Just as they reached him, the Doctor gave the nearest figure a sharp nudge. It slumped sideways and its head

twisted off and rolled across the table before bouncing onto the floor. They gaped at their smiling friend in horrified disbelief.

‘Well, don’t you see?’ giggled the Doctor. ‘They’re dummies. Just dummies!’

‘But why? What are they here for?’ Jamie demanded after a shocked pause, still not convinced.

Without replying, the Doctor thrust his hands deep into his pockets and started shuffling round and round the table muttering quietly to himself.

Zoe was still staring fixedly at the macabre tableau in front of her. ‘Doctor, did you check the radiation levels before we left the TARDIS?’ she demanded.

The Doctor stopped in his cracks. ‘Zoe, that’s just what I was trying to remember. I’m sure I did.’

Zoe shuddered slightly. ‘This place reminds me of those old atomic test ranges on Earth,’ she said nervously.

The Doctor nodded thoughtfully. ‘Yes, Zoe, I think you may be right. But why on Dulkis?’

Jamie looked puzzled. ‘But you said the Dulcians...’

‘Oh, they certainly outlawed war..’ the Doctor agreed.

Zoe moved back into the other half of the building. ‘I think ought to get back to the TARDIS and check the radiation levels again, Doctor,’ she urged him.

‘There must be some other explanation...’ the Doctor murmured, shaking his head in perplexity as he and Jamie followed.

There was a fearful gasp from Zoe. Jamie and the Doctor looked up sharply. Three tall figures in dazzling white proteetivc suits with smoked-glass visors were looming among the display cases, their heavily rhythmic breathing hissing and roaring through the respirators. Very slowly the three apparitions raised their large gloved hands and advanced towards then.

2

The Radiation Mystery

Still badly shocked after seeing, first, his three companions cold-bloodedly murdered and, now, his stranded hovercraft blown to smithereens by the alien robots in a gigantic explosion, Kully had been scrambling among the cliffs desperately trying to find out what was happening.

Grubby and exhausted, he edged cautiously round a crumbling sandstone bluff towards the strange blue boxlike structure he had just discovered. Before he reached it, he suddenly came across what looked like a huge black spider flattened into the sand. Stifling a squeal of alarm, he pulled himself together and knelt to examine the five-pointed star shape, about a metre in diameter, burnt into the ground. Something about the weird symbol sent a spiky sensation crawling up his spine.

All at once, harsh angry voices burst out nearby. Kully scuttled away in panic and hid behind the police box...

'So you destroyed the ocean craft?' Rago was saying accusingly. 'You continue to allow your destructive instincts to interfere with prime objectives.'

'Censure not accepted,' Toba retorted as the two huge figures reached the black star symbol and stopped. 'The target survey is completed. This is perimeter two. Atomic analysis is also completed.'

'Report,' Rago snapped.

'Atomic activity on this planet located only on this island. Radiation released 17.2 decades ago.'

Navigator Rago nodded approvingly. Then he noticed the TARDIS under the cliff. 'What is that artefact?' he demanded suspiciously.

'A primitive native structure,' Toba answered, his eyes gleaming expectantly. 'Shall I summon a Quark to destroy it?'

'Negative!' Rago rasped contemptuously. 'Such action would waste energy. It does not obstruct our work. We will examine the remaining targets.'

'Command accepted,' Toba gruffly acknowledged.

'Central bore is next.'

As they strode off heavily, Kully crept out from behind the TARDIS

and trailed them along the base of the cliff, his heart hammering almost audibly. Eventually they reached another spidery star melted into the sand close to the ruined building. Kully took refuge among some shattered concrete slabs and watched.

'Primitive technology,' Toba sneered as he and Rago entered the ruin and glanced around at the exhibits.

'Every culture develops,' Rago retorted coldly.

Toba picked up the laser gun that Jamie had toyed with earlier. He aimed at the wall and fired. There was a piercing whine and a jagged hole was blown clean through the concrete. Just for a second, a tremor of pleasure seemed to ripple through Toba's massive frame. Then he dropped the weapon uninterestedly. 'All this is obsolete,' he shrugged. 'There is nothing to threaten us here.'

Rago stared at his operative in despair. 'It is unwise to base your assessments on the past,' he rapped. 'Do you not conclude that more advanced weapons must have been developed since these?'

'Affirmative.'

With a viciously slicing fist, Rago thumped a nearby display cabinet which cracked all over without splintering.

'Probationer Toba,' he raged, 'because of your precipitate act of self-gratification in destroying the three inhabitants, it will be necessary to locate other specimens and to investigate and assess them in accordance with our objectives.'

Toba followed his superior outside to examine the target mark.

'This debris must be cleared away from the bore area,'

Rago ordered. 'When we have completed perimeter target checks, you will prepare a preliminary assessment and communicate to Fleet Leader.'

The Doctor, Zoe and Jamie stared helplessly at their white-suited captors through the thick glass observation-panel.

They were confined in a cramped airlock chamber and surrounded by a hot steamy vapour which was choking them and threatening to boil them alive. Through the glass, the three tall figures – who had removed their protective helmets – peered in at them from time to

time, discussing something animatedly and then hurrying over to make adjustments on a large and complex instrument panel.

‘Well, they seem... seem genuinely concerned abut our welfare...’ the Doctor managed to croak in a strangled attempt at reassurance, ‘but I fear they’re going to kill us with kindness in a minute...’ He broke off to mouth a desperate plea to the silver-haired and bearded figure who at that moment was squinting through the scalding haze at them. But the distinguished person turned back to his two young assistants and the Doctor could only resort to thumping the glass feebly.

‘I do hope we are not too late, Kando. How badly were they affected?’ the silver-haired man asked the tall fair girl at the instrument panel.

‘I cannot tell,’ Educator Balan,’ she replied. ‘The radiation level still reads zero.’

Balan turned gravely to the slim young man beside her.

‘Teel?’

‘Zero confirmed,’ Teel announced in a puzzled voice. ‘I do not understand it.’

Bolan glanced anxiously across at the three figures sagging limply against the observation port, their tongues hanging out and their eyes rolling. ‘There must be an instrument malfunction,’ he murmured. ‘They had no protection at all. The count cannot be zero;’

‘We cannot leave them in there much longer!’ Kando warned him.

After a moment of agonised indecision, Balan leaned over and touched a switch. The airlock chamber door swung open and the three sweating, gasping victims stumbled out into the clinical and complex laboratory.

‘What... what the divil are ye trying to do, ye Sassenachs... cook us?’ Jamie spluttered. ‘Cos I’m no haggis...’

The Doctor restrained him as best he could and staggered angrily over towards Balan who backed away from him pointing a small Geiger counter at arm’s length.

‘All totally un...unnecessary,’ the Doctor panted, brushing the instrument aside. ‘There’s not a trace of contamination on any of us.’

Calmly Balan checked the reading. ‘Strange, is it not?

The whole island has been lethally radioactive for 172

annos,’ he said in a cultured voice.

‘Well, it isn’t now!’ Jamie snapped rudely, clutching his head.

‘Of course it is,’ Kando corrected him politely.

‘I suggest that you check,’ the Doctor advised Balan firmly.

‘We have only just arrived here,’ Teel explained. ‘The annual environmental audit will he conducted during the next few days.’

The Doctor moved closer to Balan and addressed him with confidential urgency. ‘I insist that you order a check immediately. It could be of the utmost importance.’

Balan stared impassively at the dapper stranger for a moment. Then he turned and nodded to Teel. The young Dulcian picked up the Geiger counter and his helmet, and hurried out.

‘What is happening here?’ Balan suddenly demanded, glancing at Zoe and Jamie. ‘I was not aware that any other persons were permitted to work on the Island.’

‘Neither was I,’ bluffed the Doctor, smiling courteously.

‘We were rather hoping that you might be able to enlighten us.’

Zoe stared at the formidable array of equipment around them.

‘Why is the Island supposed to be so dangerous?’ she asked, wincing from the dull headache her recent ordeal had given her.

Balan frowned in surprise. ‘Everyone is aware of the atomic test...’

‘But I thought you had abolished such research here on Dulkis,’ the Doctor exclaimed.

Balan shook his head. ‘You seem very poorly informed about your own planet.’

‘That’s because our own planet is...’ Jamie clammed up as the Doctor kicked him sharply in the ankle. But it was too late.

The Doctor looked furious, but simply shrugged. ‘As Jamie was about to reveal, we come from a different planet... indeed from a different time,’ he admitted.

Balan seemed completely unmoved. ‘Really? Not from Dulkis. I must record that in the bulletin,’ he said. Then he smiled indulgently: ‘That explains why you exposed yourselves to the dangers on the Island. No Dulcian would be so foolhardy.’

‘Then what the divil are *you* doing here?’ Jamie demanded roughly, turning to Kando.

She drew herself up with elegant pride. ‘We are members of Educator Balan’s university research group’

The Doctor intervened hastily. ‘When I visited Dulkis before, it was a civilised and peaceful place,’ he remarked gently.

Again Balan looked singularly unimpressed. ‘This is not your first visit. I must note that in the bulletin.’

‘But what has happened here?’ the Doctor inquired impatiently. ‘Why are you conducting atomic tests?’

Balan smiled and turned to Kando. ‘The Seventh Council...’ he prompted her.

There was a brief silence while Kando muttered parrot-fashion under her breath about fifth and sixth councils and the Doctor shuffled restlessly from foot to foot, nodding encouragement.

‘... the Seventh Council under Director Manus initiated research into atomic energy, using this Island as a test site for the device, the results of which can be seen today...’

Kando recited tonelessly. ‘Thereafter all such projects were prohibited. The Island is preserved as a museum and as a warning to future generations.’

‘She’s certainly done her homework!’ Zoe remarked, with a sarcastic grimace at Jamie.

Oblivious, Balan beamed at his pupil approvingly.

Meanwhile the Doctor had wandered off around the laboratory, shoulders hunched, hands deep in pockets.

‘Atomic weapons or no atomic weapons... that was quite a bang we heard,’ he murmured. Then he stopped in his tracks, face to face with Balan. ‘So what has happened to all that radiation?’ he demanded. ‘I do hope you don’t suspect that its disappearance has got anything to do with us!’

As soon as Rago and Toba were out of sight, Kully emerged from his cramped niche among the debris and scurried over to look at the sticky black markings in the sand, not far from the wall of the museum. Then he noticed several sets of regular rectangular tracks and shuddered at the memory of the ruthless robots he had seen earlier.

A sudden movement behind him made him jerk round with a gasp. A tall faceless white figure was clambering over the wreckage towards the ruin. Springing up, Kully started to run as fast as his short plump legs would carry him, away towards the dunes.

‘Kully... Kully!’ rasped an echoing metallic voice. ‘What are doing here?’

Kull stopped but dare not turn round. ‘Who... who isthat?’ he shouted, as heavy footfalls thumped up behind him.

‘It is Teel. I am with the survey group.’

Kelly spun round, almost crying with relief as the suited figure ran up to him. He peered into the dark visor, but saw only his own terrified bulbous face reflecting back at him.

‘Surely you remember me?’ rasped the voice through the helmet speaker.

‘Survey group!’ Kelly gasped, gripping Teel’s arm.

‘Take me there. Quickly, take me there.’

‘But what are you doing out here like that?’ the voice demanded in astonishment.

Kully tugged frantically at the thick suit-sleeve. ‘Don’t argue, just take no there; he pleaded.

As Teel led the way swiftly hack to the survey module, Kully trotted along beside him endlessly jabbering about aliens and robots and giant wooden boxes, until Teel began to fear that either the frenzied

Dulcian had lost his sanity or he was suffering from some kind of radiation sickness.

Meanwhile, back in the cool humming chamber of the survey module the Doctor was pacing agitatedly. ‘But why should you think that we are responsible?’ he objected.

Balan shrugged. ‘It is possible that your craft... your TARDIS has attracted the radiation somehow and absorbed it,’; he speculated blandly.

‘Nonsense. Quite out of the question,’ the Doctor protested vehemently, running a critical eye over the module’s instruments.

Zoe and Jamie were deep in conversation with Kando.

‘Do spacecraft often visit Dulk s?’ Zoe wondered.

‘I believe that yours is the first,’ Kando replied.

Jamie looked baffled. ‘Bell, ye dinna seem very surprised a see us.’

Kando frowned at the strange young man’s curious speech. ‘We Dulcians are taught to accept fact,’ she explained. ‘You are here – that is fact. That you come from another planet I must accept as fact, since I have no evidence to prove otherwise.’

Jame stared mischievously at her, trying to think up some way to shock the serene young Dulcian.

Suddenly the airlock hissed open and Teel entered, removing his helmet. ‘Not a trace of local radiation,’ he announced. ‘But look what I did find!’ he added, ushering forward a dusty, rumpled figure covered in scratches.

‘Kull y!’ Balan exclaimed with a start. ‘How do you come to be...?’

‘Never mind that now,’ Kully cried, ignoring the Doctor and his two companions and seizing the Educator by the arm. ‘We must get back to the Capitol immediately.’

‘Impossible,’ Balan retorted. ‘We have not even begun our survey for the annual audit.’

Kully stared at him wild-eyed. ‘You’ll all be wiped out here!’ he cried.

Teel laughed uncomfortably. ‘He claims to have seen aliens and killer

robots and spacecraft,' he explained.

Balan turned to the Doctor. 'You did not mention that you had brought robots.'

Before the Doctor could reply, Kully babbled on recklessly. 'Listen, Balan, I brought three citizens to the Island in my hovercraft. The robots killed them and destroyed the ship.'

Balan started to smile and then broke into a deep remnant laughter as he turned to the Doctor, Jamie and Zoe. 'Three citizens... I sec. Really Kully, you and your three friends here should at least have agreed on the same story.'

The Doctor looked flustered. 'I have never seen this person before in my life,' he protested, gesturing at Kully.

Balan turned gravely to the dishevelled Dulcian. 'Kully, you may be the son of our distinguished Director, but you had no right to bring these people here without authorisation,' he said coldly.

Kully stared in turn at the three strangers. 'These aren't my clients. I've never seen them before,' he retorted. Then he grabbed Balan's arm again. 'Listen, you old fool, there's no time to lose. Call up my father in the Capitol... at least he's not as senile as you are.'

Before the outraged Educator could find words to reply, the Doctor hurriedly intervened. 'You say that you saw a spacecraft?' he asked Kully.

'I've already told you!' Kully yelled in exasperation.

'And robots... *horrible* things.'

The Doctor looked anxious. 'This spacecraft, it wasn't sort of square like a tall wooden box...?'

Kully wrinkled his snub n impatiently. 'No, no, no...

that's not the spacecraft. It's circular and flattish and silvery.'

Balan snorted scornfully.

'The blue box is somewhere else. By the black star,'

Kully chattered excitedly. 'The aliens were there. They were talking about destroying it,' he shuddered.

‘The TARDIS!’ Zoe and Jamie chorused.

The Doctor turned urgently to his young friends. ‘We’d better go at once,’ he cried.

Balan raised a restraining hand. ‘My dear sir, you will be wasting your time,’ he warned.

‘My dear sir, time cannot be...’ the Doctor stopped himself, turned and ran to the airlock. ‘Come on, you two,’

he shouted.

Jamie hurried over, but Zoe held back. ‘I think I’d rather stay here, Doctor,’ she murmured.

The Doctor nodded. ‘We won’t be long,’ he waved, opening the hatch. Before Zoe could object, they were gone. Filled with foreboding, Zoe wandered aimlessly round the module trying to ignore the fierce argument which had flared up between Kelly and Balan, while Teel and Kando occupied themselves with an elaborate communications unit along the far wall.

‘I am sorry, Kully, but I can take no action until I have contacted the Director,’ Balan concluded adamantly.

Kully grimaced. ‘We all know what the old man will say. ‘Do nothing.’

Balan struggled to remain calm. ‘Better to do nothing than to cause unnecessary panic in the community.’

‘Vegetables. Just vegetables the lot of you!’ Kully snapped.

‘Show’ some respect!’ Balan thundered. ‘If not for me then at least for your father.’ He swept over to the communications unit.

Teel indicated the useless strobing and flashing on the screen. ‘There is powerful interference, Balan,’ he reported apologetically. ‘It is most unusual.’

‘That’ll be the robots..’ Kelly muttered exhaustedly.

Zoe went over to the disconsolate little figure. ‘You don’t seem to be having much success convincing them,’

she said sympathetically.

Kully pulled a grotesque face. ‘Fossils. They don’t really live, they just exist; he despaired. ‘At least your Doctor friend showed some interest.’

‘He has a very enquiring mind, luckily,’ Zoe said with a smile.

Kully grinned bleakly. ‘Then he’ll be as unpopular as I am.’

‘Whatever do you mean?’

‘Oh, I use don’t fit the Dulcian mould,’ Kully explained wryly. ‘Their shapely civilised society. Everybody thinking and living alike.’

Bolan suddenly clapped his hands. ‘Quiet. We have made contact with Director Senex,’ he announced.

They looked at the screen. A clear image was just beginning to form.

‘Here we go,’ Kully groaned. ‘Words of wisdom from on high...’

‘Well, they’ve no harmed the TARDIS anyway,’ reported Jamie after he had briefly inspected the dilapidated structure.

The Doctor was on his hands and knees near by, his nose almost touching the sand as he examined the tacky black markings scorched in the ground. ‘Look at this, Jamie,’ he muttered, ‘most interesting.’

Jamie glanced at the five-pointed star. Then he noticed the sets of tracks. ‘Hey, Doctor, what are these?’ he cried excitedly.

Scrambling to his feet, the Doctor hurried over. Two pairs of rectangular prints led away among the dunes along the foot of the cliffs. The Doctor pondered a moment.

‘Now who or what leaves footprints like these?’ he murmured.

‘Footprints.. ‘ Jamie whispered, grinning uneasily as he looked warily around at the desolate landscape.

The Doctor sniffed the air expectantly. ‘Come along, Jamie, let’s follow them... or it... shall we?’ He darted off nimbly over the brittle, ochre-coloured sandhills.

Reluctantly Jamie caught up and they followed the strange oblong tracks for about two kilometres. Eventually, climbing a short slope, they found themselves staring at the huge silver saucer ounted on its broad central column.

Instinctively Jamie threw himself face-down in the sand, but the Doctor remained standing, shielding his eyes from the glare and gazing intently at the opening at the bottom of the shaft.

Slowly Jamie got to his feet. ‘I reckon we ought to get back to Zoe now, Doctor,’ he suggested nervously. ‘She’ll be worried.’

But the Doctor had already begun to creep forward towards the awesome machine gleaming menacingly against the cliff.

‘You’re not thinking what I think you’re thinking... are you Doctor?’ Jamie whispered, clutching his sleeve.

‘Most definitely,’ the Doctor grinned, still staring in fascination at the open hatchway.

‘Och no...’ Jamie pleaded, frowning at the hundreds of track marks criss-crossing the hollow in front of the ominously looming saucer. ‘Can ye no keep oot a trouble just for once?’

They finally reached the curved hatchway and the Doctor stopped to admire the underside of the gigantic craft spread out above them.

‘How absolutely splendid; he murmured almost reverently. ‘Yes, obviously an interstellar craft of quite sophisticated design, no doubt powered by some kind of...’

The Doctor paused as his arm was gripped painfully.

‘Don’t do that Jamie...’ he protested.

Jamie’s gasp of horror made the Doctor jerk round. His jaw dropped open and his eyes widened in surprise and dismay. ‘Oh dear. Oh Jamie. Oh my goodness,’ he muttered, making Jamie wince as he gripped his arm in turn.

Two Quarks were standing a few metres away, cutting off their escape. The Doctor and Jamie stared at the squat, buzzing robots for a moment and then turned back in futile desperation towards the hatchway. The opening was filled by Toba’s huge gaunt figure. His massive gloves creaked as he opened his hands in a gesture of ironic welcome on the threshold of the spacecraft.

‘Do not move. Do not move!’ bleated the Quarks, in a kind of crazed falsetto.

The Doctor and Jam continued to stare into Toba's expressionless green eyes while behind them the Quarks chattered away, extending their probes and charging their weapon systems. An unearthly smile carved deep fissures in Tobas mask-like face and a livid pink tongue darted out momentarily to moisten his thin lifeless lips. Then his red-rimmed eyes lit up with a hypnotic gleam which seemed to be fired by hate and greed and lust and madness, all together.

'Quarks!' he suddenly rasped, his gloves creaking in eager anticipation. 'Prepare.

3

The Assessment

Prodded viciously by the buzzing Quarks, the Doctor and Jamie soon found themselves entering the vast circular control centre at the heart of the alien ship. The chamber was filled with a ghostly glow from the fluorescent graphics and systems displays covering the walls. In the middle, on a raised circular dais, stood the main control column consisting of a mosaic of flickering crystal buttons set into a sphere which was mounted on a slim metal stalk, like some giant tropical bloom. Otherwise the chamber was streamlined and bare

'Approach!' Rago ordered.

The Quarks propelled their captives across to the dials where Rago loomed over them, his emerald eyes glittering in the soft rainbow luminosity. Toba stood behind them breathing heavily.

'Who arc you?' Jam croaked, his throat dry with fear.

The towering figure glowered down at them. 'We are Dominators,' he announced, his voice echoing around the dome above.

'That's quite evident,' the Doctor muttered wryly.

Toba emitted a dangerous hiss. Jamie shivered despite himself.

'Assess the specimens,' Rago ordered tersely.

'Stand against the panel!' Toba rapped, whirling the prisoners round bodily and thrusting them towards a flat section of wall.

'I will not!' Jamie exploded, tearing himself free.

'Jamie...' warned the Doctor, shuffling obediently to the panel.

‘The Dominators are obeyed!’ Toba roared.

Jame stood his ground. ‘Not by *me*,’ he retorted.

‘Quark!’

One of the robots whirred into action, its long crystal antennae glowing reddish white. There was a rapid throbbing and and the young Scot was flung against the panel. He hung there dazed and limp for a moment. Then he feebly starred to struggle.

‘Help me... help me, Doctor...’ he pleaded.

As soon as the Doctor responded, the staccato throbbing burst out again and he too was forced against the panel.

Rago smiled contemptuously. ‘It is useless to resist. My Quark has bonded your bodies to the panel by means of molecular adhesion,’ he boomed.

Toba touched some switches and Jamie’s section of panelling immediately slid outward and then swung through 90 degrees to form a horizontal pallet.

‘What are ye doing to me?’ Jamie gasped, transfixed with terror as a transparent globular apparatus swung out and hung suspended over his body.

‘Aliens are ocassionally of use to us,’ Rago explained coldly. ‘We shall assess your physiological status. Quark!’

One of the robots tramped rapidly over and connected its two probes into sockets at the foot of Jamie’s pallet.

Frantically Jamie tried to twist himself free, his eyes staring wildly and his white face glistening with sweat.

‘Doctor... can ye no do anything?’ he panted.

‘Activate!’ Rago snapped, stepping down from the dais.

The Quark emitted a crazed giggling noise and the globular device above Jame started to glow. Helplessly the Doctor watched as Rago took a kind of visor resembling an ophthalmoscope from Toba and slipped it over his head.

Jam was bathed in an eerie bluish aura as the Dominator bent over to

examine him.

‘Brittle skeletal structure... calcium phosphate...

reasonable degree of flexibility and muscular strength...’

Rago murmured. ‘Single heart... superfluous organ present right side...’

Jamie shuddered as Rago’s eye, magnified to monstrous proportions by the visor, bored relentlessly into his own.

‘Simple brain circuitry...’ Rago continued tonelessly,

‘signs of recent rapid learning... little intellectual development.’ At last Rago straightened up and took off the visor. ‘Assessment: possible marginal utility for elementary labour tasks,’ he concluded.

‘Shall I prepare the second specimen for scrutiny?’ Toba asked eagerly.

Rago considered the Doctor for a moment. ‘Negative.

They will be identical. Conserve power,’ he decided.

The Quark disconnected its probes, the apparatus withdrew and the panel tilted back to the vertical. Jamie hung beside the Doctor pale and drained, his stomach cramped with nausea from the effects of the body scanner.

Toba turned expectantly to his superior. ‘Sine these specimens are of inferior quality we can destroy them,’ he proposed.

‘Negative. They will perform in a labour force.’

‘We have the Quarks for such functions,’ Toba objected.

‘I repeat, Toba: the Quarks’ power must he conserved.’

Rago turned abruptly away and stood staring into the Doctor’s mild brown eyes. The Doctor stared unflinchingly back, the faintest of smiles flickering around his mouth.

‘Set up a Neuro-Initiative Test on this specimen,’ Rago suddenly ordered, pointing at the Doctor.

The Doctor’s smile vanished at once and he swallowed apprehensively. ‘Oh dear me,’ he muttered miserably, ‘not a NIT.’

In the survey module, Teel struggled to visual maintain contact with the Capitol, but the image of Director Senex oscillated fitfully and finally broke up into a storm of static. However, the Director's imperturbable voice continued to filter faintly through:

'Four image is fading. Educator Balan... I regret that it is not possible to evaluate your...'

'Oh never mind the picture, Father,' Kully butted in irritably, 'just tell us what you're going to do.'

The audio circuit hissed and squealed, and Senex became only just distinguishable. 'I cannot understand you, Balan... Send Kully and the strangers to the Capitol immediately... I will question them here...'

Kully shouldered his way between Balan and Teel:

'Father, listen to me.. ' he shouted into the receiver,

'Father, there's no time...'

Teel shook his head. 'I am sorry, Kully, but they have terminated reception.'

Kully thumped himself on the forehead. 'Typical Dulcian behaviour,' he exclaimed in despair. 'Something unusual happens, something you don't understand, and you just switch off. Up here.'

Kando glanced round from the transporter unit. 'The capsule is priming now, Balan,' she reported.

Kelly wandered gloomily over to Zoe, who had been trying not to get in the way. 'Ever travelled in a capsule before?' he enquired.

'No. How do they work?'

Kully shrugged. 'No idea. Hate the things myself.' He turned suddenly to Balan. 'You see? The girl asked a question, therefore she can't possibly be a Dulcian. She must have an enquiring mind,' he said with a facetious grin.

Balan was unimpressed 'Your father will decide,' he replied humourlessly. Then he turned courteously to Zoe.

'As soon as your two friends return they will follow' in the second capsule,' he explained.

Zoe looked apprehensive. ‘Wouldn’t it be simpler to wait and all go together?’ she suggested with a nervous little laugh.

‘Travel capsules carry only two persons,’ Kando informed her. ‘Capsule one is primed, Balan.’

Balan squeezed Zoe’s arm encouragingly. ‘There is nothing to fear,’ he told her gently.

Zoe giggled. ‘Oh I’m not afraid I’m looking forward to it,’ she lied.

‘Well, *I'm* not,’ Kully murmured grumpily, leading the way over to a section of transparent tube set into the wall.

Inside the tube was a long bullet-shaped vehicle, with a sliding canopy which opened to reveal two small seats, set one in front of the other. Zoe noted the absence of visible controls, apart from a digital display and a few touch-buttons in the front panel.

‘Come on, then, let’s try to stir up a bit of action in the Capitol,’ Kully said, reluctantly squeezing his chubby frame into the cramped front seat.

After a momentary hesitation, Zoe climbed in behind him.

Balan leaned in and touched a sequence of buttons. ‘I will programme for the Capitol if you will allow me,’ he said firmly.

‘Afraid I might get lost?’ Kully chuckled, watching Balan operate the route lock button.

With a swish the transparent canopy and the hatch in the launch tube both slid shut.

‘I hope you know how to fly this contraption,’ Kully joked, as the capsule suddenly accelerated away along the tube and then abruptly tilted at a steep angle upwards.

Seconds later they were climbing at tremendous speed through dense white clouds, and the capsule was vibrating and gyrating sickeningly. Pale and silent, Zoe gritted her teeth and clung to her sear, convinced that she had left her stomach far behind her.

‘Selectors are a bit worn,’ Kully remarked casually over his shoulder, ‘but you just sit back and relax. It’ll be all right as soon we level off.’

After a while the capsule stopped vibrating and gradually levelled off.

‘Does this thing land automatically as well?’ Zoe enquired in a faint voice.

‘Usually,’ Kully chuckled. ‘In the old days everything had to be done manually, of course. Must have led to a great feeling of pride and achievement.’

‘And an awful lot of accidents!’ Zoe added ruefully.

‘Yes, but at least people exercised their individual skills and judgement. Now all that’s gone.’

Zoe gripped her seat even more firmly. ‘You... you mean you can’t control this thing *at all*?’

Kully shrugged. ‘There are switches here for emergencies... but I can’t remember how to use them.’

The capsule suddenly dived sharply and then came level again.

‘Very comforting!’ Zoe muttered, clutching her tummy.

‘Don’t worry,’ Kully cried gaily. ‘Nothing will go wrong. Not on Dulkis. Father wouldn’t allow it.’

‘Why don’t you for on with your father?’ Zoe asked.

‘Oh, her all right. I suppose,’ Kulle admitted. ‘He’s just gone a little too far. He got rid of aggression and all that, but now curiosity’s gone as well. There’s no desire for adventure...’

Kully’s words were swallowed up by a piercing whine as the capsule pitched abruptly into a steep nosedive. Zoe could not help screaming as it accelerated faster and faster towards the vertical and the clouds merged into a dizzy blur outside the canopy...

The Doctor and Jamie were rapidly growing weaker and weaker from the effects of the molecular adhesion pinning them firmly to the wall of the control centre. Helplessly they watched Rago and Toba setting up an elaborate testing apparatus on the central dais.

‘For optimum slave personnel we shall require strength and obedience, but only sufficient intelligence to make them efficient and not dangerous...’ Rago was saying.

Jamie grimaced. ‘So they want to know how clever we are,’ he whispered feebly out of the corner of his mouth.

‘Or how stupid we are...’ the Doctor muttered hoarsely.

‘That might be more to our advantage, Jamie.’ He squinted at the device through half-closed eyes. It resembled a game board perforated with differently shaped holes and with a pair of earphones wired to a network of circuitry beneath it. Along one edge of the board was fitted a vertical plate containing two fist-sized apertures side by side. Along the opposite edge ran a tray filled with an assortment of small solid shapes rather like model building-blocks.

‘You have to fit the shapes into the correct holes,’ the Doctor explained under his breath.

‘But a wee bairn could do that,’ Jamie croaked, ‘it’s simple.’

The Doctor nodded. ‘That’s what worries me, Jamie. It’s too simple.’

Jamie’s dulled eyes suddenly brightened. ‘Doctor... you nodded,’ he gasped. ‘You moved.’

‘Dear me, Jamie, so I did, the Doctor muttered cautiously. He twitched his finger, clenched his hand, raised his arm and finally eased his body away from the wall. ‘I’m free!’ he breathed. ‘How about you?’

Scarcely daring to try. Jamie eventually prised himself a few centimetre’s away from the panel. ‘Aye, me too.’

The Doctor glanced covertly across the huge chamber towards the elevator system which had brought them tip from ground level earlier.The Dominators were engrossed in their apparatus. A reckless idea flashed into the Doctor’s mind...

But at the same instant, one of the Quarks’ antennae sparked and the robot marched menacingly towards the prisoners. ‘Adhesion expired. Are the specimens to be re-fused?’ it bleated shrilly.

‘Negative!’ Rago snapped, turning sharply. ‘Commence the test.’

Prodded by the Quark, the Doctor shuffled wearily across to the dais. ‘What are you going to do to us?’ he asked submissively.

Toba clamped the earphones to the Doctor’s temples and thrust the Doctor’s hands through the circular openings in the vertical plate. ‘Quark!’ Toba ordered.

The nearest robot connected its probes into the circuits at the base of

the board and its antennae glowed blood-red.

The Doctor immediately contorted in agony, struggling to free his hands so that he could tear the screaming phones from his ears, but his hands were paralysed. After a few seconds the Quark's antennae stopped glowing and the Doctor sagged limply to his knees.

Tuba's face was a waxen mask of cruel enjoyment. 'The goad will be repeated regularly until the puzzle is reassembled,' he rasped malevolently. 'Begin!'

Powerless to intervene, Jam could only look on as the Doctor fumbled clumsily with the perspex shapes, trying to force them into completely unsuitable holes in the board.

'Come on, Doctor, the square hole... no, the *square* hole,'

Jam cried as the Quark's antennae glowed and the Doctor dropped the shapes and twisted pitifully.

The Quark switched off the goad and the Doctor struggled to pick up the shapes in his horribly clenched hands again.

'Och ye canna be sae daft... the *triangle*...' Jamie pleaded.

'Whatever's the matter wi' ye?'

But the Doctor kept fumbling and dropping the pieces.

A third time the goad was switched on and the Doctor sprang back, arched like a bow, with his swollen tongue trapped between gnashing teeth and his eyes crossing and bulging horribly in his lolling head. Frozen into silence, Jamie gaped in futile desperation at his tortured friend.

'Quark, terminate!' Rago ordered.

Toba wrenched the earphones from the Doctor's head, dragged his gnarled hands through the plate and shook him back to consciousness. Meanwhile Rago was staring intently at the specimen, almost as if he suspected that all was not as it seemed.

Boiling with rage, Jamie hurried over and supported the Doctor while he found his feet again. 'Are you all right, Doctor?' he murmured, peering anxiously into the flushed, contorted face.

'Yes, yes, I'm in the pink, Jamie. Just a little dazed though.'

‘What are you up to? That puzzle was easy,’ Jamie whispered.

The Doctor gave a shy wink. ‘A stupid enemy is far less of a threat than an intelligent one,’ he whispered, grinning mischievously. ‘Just act stupid, Jamie. Can you manage that?’

‘Aye, it’s easy...’ Jamie caught the Doctor’s eye and realised he was being sent up. ‘Och you’re in the pink all right,’ he mumbled shamefacedly.

They fell silent as they became aware of Rago’s unwavering gaze on them. Nudging Jamie to follow suit, the Doctor meekly shuffled to the edge of the dais and sat with his legs dangling and a vacant expression on his face.

Suddenly Toba rapped out an order and the Quarks marched forward and connected their probes into the edge of the circular platform. ‘Power,’ Toba snapped. The two sets of antennae sparked in unison.

Rago watched the Doctor arefully as he looked around, nodding and grinning and patting Jamie’s knee reassuringly.

‘Now stand up!’ Toba boomed.

The Doctor obediently lowered his feet to the deck and immediately jumped back up onto the dais as a vivid blue flash exploded under his shoes.

‘Stand up!’ Toba repeated in an almost maniacal tone.

Gingerly Jamie edged forward and again there was a viscious crack as his sturdy hobnailed boots touched the deck, causing him to jerk his legs into the air as he rolled on his back on the dais.

‘Get down!’ Toba shrieked.

‘Let’s try over there,’ the Doctor suggested in a ponderous voice, as if he were solving some fantastically complex problem.

‘You are surrounded,’ Toba snarled contemptuously.

The Doctor and Jamie stared at each other and then shook their heads, lifting their feet and pointing hopelessly at their smoking boots like a pair of vaudeville clowns.

‘These specimens are utterly useless,’ Toba hissed, turning to Rago. ‘That is are assessment.’

The Navigator's waxen nostrils flared and the red rims of his eyes brightened. 'Their behaviour is variance with information we already possess,' he said ominously. 'Those weapons we examined in the ruin could not have been devised by such apparent simpletons as these.' Rago turned to a Quark. 'Report to Fleet Leader. Fleet Refuel Project proceeds to plan. However, status of indigenous species is not yet determined.'

The Quark marched across to a communications panel and plugged itself in.

Rago surveyed his two prisoners cowering on the dais.

'Follow,' he ordered, turning abruptly towards the elevator.

'But we can't get off without... without...' the Doctor's plea trailed pathetically into silence.

'Jump!' Rago retorted.

it'arily the two captives got to their feet and stood gazing down at the deck as though it were a yawning chasm below them. Then the Doctor clasped Jamie by the hand, shut his eyes and they both jumped safely off the dais.

'A simple electrical circuit, completed by your bodies when you attempted to stand up,' Rago explained to the amazed pair. 'Evidently you know nothing of electricity.'

The Doctor frowned. 'Electricity? What is that?'

The Navigator strode over to the Doctor. 'Are you such a fool? You have intelligent eyes,' he rasped.

For a moment Jamie thought the Doctor was going to abandon his pretence, but he simply stared up at the huge Dominator with wide, innocent eyes. There was a spine-chilling pause.

'One final test...' Rago announced, striding over to the elevator. 'Bring them...'

4

Heads in the Sand

On the Dulcian mainland the Capitol basked in the warm clear light from Dulkis's modest yellow sun, its thousands of silver terraces

gleaming and its endless windows reflecting the golden sky. Long cool galleries filled with lush green vegetation stretched in all directions and every few metres small fountains cast fine shimmering sprays of purified water in myriad colours. The atmosphere was relaxed and hushed. Everywhere, the tall inhabitants, moved about calmly in their loose light togas, conversing in quiet unhurried voices.

In the Council Chamber, high in the domed summit of the vast city, half a dozen elderly Dulcians were lounging in padded reclining chairs, each fitted with its own small vision screen and its individual refreshment rack laden with exotic fruits and colourful iced drinks. The Councillors had high foreheads and swept-hack hair and the skin of their long sensitive faces was lined but blooming. Around them, subtle combinations, of pastel colours endlessly mingled on the curved opalescent walls and softly soothing sounds floated continuously through the scented air.

Deputy Director Bovem arranged his flowing white robe and settled back into the cushions. ‘Very well. It is agreed, subject naturally to the approval of Director Senex, that the area in question be developed for exclusively leisure and holiday activity,’ he announced in a musical voice.

‘But have the Councillors given all due consideration to the submissions of the Industrial Committee?’ asked a florid member, sipping from a tall slim glass.

Bovem raised an elegant hand. ‘Really Councillors, I do not wish to hurry you, but we have been debating this matter for several lunars and I feel sure...’

He was interrupted by a series of bell-like tones and then a quiet voice filled the Chamber: ‘Citizen Kully has arrived accompanied by a stranger. They wait in the Antechamber.’

Bovem touched a button in the arm of his couch. ‘Let them remain there until Director Senex has been informed,’ he instructed.

Without warning, a section of the well dissolved and Kully came bursting in followed by Zoe, both of them out of breath. The wall automatically re-formed itself behind them.

Kully stomped straight over to Bovem, scattering sand and wiping his shining face with the hem of his skirt. ‘If you think we’re going to kick our heels while you gossip away for hours on end you’re mistaken,’ he shouted.

Bovem rose to his feet with strained dignity. ‘Inform the Director that his son is here,’ he ordered. Then he gathered his robe in a classically authoritative pose. ‘This is an outrageous abuse of the Council’s dignity,’ he protested.

‘Who cares about that?’ Kully retorted. ‘I’ve got vitally important news.’

The Deputy Director permitted himself a faintly ironic smile. ‘What fairy tale have you concocted this time?’ he demanded. ‘And who is this young lady?’

Kully ushered Zoe forward. She looked pale and shaken after the hair-raising flight in the capsule.

‘This is Zoe. Her friends will be arriving soon. I met them all on the Island.’

Galan frowned. ‘Doubtless none of you possessed the necessary permits.’

‘Don’t be stupid!’ Kully shouted exasperatedly. ‘How could they have permits? They come from another planet.’

There was a startled pause. Then a murmur of disbelief rippled round the Chamber.

A gaunt, hook-nosed Councillor waved a languid arm.

‘Nonsense. The existence of extra-Dulcian life has been conclusively disproved by the Scientific Committee.’

A younger Councillor shook his head. ‘Not conclusively.

It is possible that life in some form does exist elswhere,’ he argued.

Kully grabbed an orange fruit from the nearest rack.

‘Listen, there’s no time for the usual three-lunar debate,’

he snapped, biting hungrily and sending a stream of juice in all directions. ‘Can’t you understand what’s happened?

A spacecraft has landed on the Island with aliens and robots, and they’ve killed Wahed, Tolata and Etnin!’

The atmosphere in the Council Chamber abruptly changed. Bovem

walked slowly up to Zoe and stared searchingly into her face. ‘Aliens?’ he murmured gravely.

‘Murder?’

Zoe squirmed uncomfortably and said nothing.

‘Kully!’ called a thin, cultured voice. At once everyone looked round in surprise. A very tall figure with fine silver hair and a pointed beard was standing by the wall. His robe was edged with a narrow green band.

‘Director Senex... we were not aware...’ Bovem faltered.

The Director raised his pale hand. ‘Quite.’ He gazed impassively at Zoe for a moment with keen blue eyes. Then he moved elegantly across to his chair. ‘I shall speak with Kully and the stranger alone,’ he announced.

The Councillors immediately rose and Bovem led them out in respectful silence. Zoe watched in uneasy bewilderment as Senex slowly took his seat. His face seemed filled with peace, wisdom and intelligence.

‘Do you enjoy being treated as a clown, Kully?’ he enquired at last.

Kully stared sulkily at his father and said nothing.

Senex turned to Zoe.’ What were you doing on the Island?’ he said gently, glancing at her unfamiliar clothing.

Zoe shrugged. ‘Nothing really. Just looking around.’

Senex glared at his son. ‘How could you expose foolish innocent citizens to such danger?’ he demanded severely.

‘But I didn’t take Zoe...’ Kully started to protest.

Senex waved his hand impatiently. ‘We know all about your irresponsible escapades.’

Kully looked genuinely shocked. ‘You knew? Then why didn’t you prosecute me?’

Senex frowned. ‘Prosecution would simply have flattered your reckless ego and it would have reflected badly upon myself.’

Kully clutched his head in his podgy hands: ‘Why can’t I be treated as an individual instead of always as “the son of our distinguished Director”?’ he groaned despairingly.

The Director ignored this and turned back to Zoe.

‘Please tell me exactly what happened,’ he requested courteously.

Zoe took a deep breath. ‘Well, your... your worship... the Doctor and Jamie and I had just landed on the Island in the TARDIS...’

‘The TARDIS?’

‘Oh, a Time And Relative Dimensions In Space machine,’ Zoe explained.

‘Transcends Time and Space Field Parameters...’ added Kully helpfully.

Senex rose angrily to his feet. ‘This game has gone quite far enough, Kully,’ he warned.

‘Oh, but it’s true,’ Zoe insisted, ‘ask the Doctor and Jamie. They’ll be arriving soon.’

Senex’s noble face clouded ominously. ‘What do you hope to achieve by this elaborate play-acting, Kully?’ he demanded in outraged undertone.

Kully could stand it no longer. He seized the loose folds of his father’s robe and almost shook him off his feet. ‘I told you the truth on the vision link,’ he shouted. ‘A spacecraft has landed. Three people have been killed.

Radioactivity has disappeared and there are robots destroying everything in sight Now please *do* something before it’s too late.’

The Director was virtually trapped face to face with his raging son. ‘And no doubt Zoe will confirm all this?’ he murmured.

Zoe glanced uncertainly at Kully. ‘Well... I haven’t actually *seen* the spacecraft and the robots...’ she mumbled apprehensively, ‘but Jamie and the Doctor...’

With unexpected force, Senex freed himself from Kully’s tenacious grasp. ‘So. We have only *your* word Kully; he breathed. ‘And bitter experience has taught us all just how reliable *that* is.’

Inside the ruined museum the tension was becoming unbearable as Jamie and the Doctor stood facing one another a few metres apart, each guarded by a Quark with its probes extended and primed. Rago had handed the Doctor the laser gun from the showcase.

'What is it?' the Dominator demanded.

The Doctor peered at the weapon short-sightedly. 'Its a sort of a gun...'

'Explain its function.'

The Doctor hesitated. 'Well, I... it kills people...'

'Fire it!' Rago commanded.

Jamie's heart leapt into his throat as the Doctor pointed the laser vaguely in his direction while preending to work out its mechanism, but he gritted his teeth and kept quiet.

For a few awful seconds the incessant chattering of the Quarks' circuits was the only sound.

Then Rago snatched the weapon and handed it to Jamie.

'You fire it!' he rapped.

Jamie frowned. 'Ah dinna ken how ta werk it,' he mumbled. pointing the barrel at Toba.

There was a violent bleating and flashing from the two robots and Jamie immediately swung the laser towards the Doctor.

'Obey!' Toba bellowed.

Suddenly the weapon emitted a shrill whirring and the Doctor ducked out of range with a genuine gasp of fright.

Jamie continued to fumble and the gun repeated the whirring several times but did not discharge.

The Doctor was trembling and sweating but he pulled himself together and managed to grin simple-mindedly at the Dominators. 'We don't really understand such devices on Dulkis,' he blustered. 'You see, we haven't used them for decades...'

Rago took the laser from Jamie and aimed it point-blank at the Doctor's head. 'So you do not understand this weapon?' he said

quietly.

The Doctor shook his head, licking his dry lips. All at once the laser whirred and then fired. The Doctor had no time to even flinch. Jamie screamed in horror and covered his face.

'Neutral mode,' Rago explained, smiling cruelly at the Doctor's sweat-soaked face, 'for testing only.'

Jamie was almost crying with relief and for a while the Doctor was unable to speak.

'Ah yes, the Clever Ones,' he eventually muttered. 'They invented the weapons, but they stopped us using them...'

Rago's interest was aroused. 'Clever Ones? Then there are two distinct species on this planet?' he suggested.

The Doctor nodded resentfully. 'Not many Clever Ones left now. We don't like them. They tell us what to do.'

Tossing the gun aside, Rago grunted with satisfaction.

'There appears to be no danger from these primitives and the others are pacifists,' he brusquely informed Toba.

The Probationer raised his huge grasping gloves. 'These primitives are useless to us. They should be destroyed.'

Rago turned on him. 'Negative. They can perform menial tasks for us in due course' The Navigator swung round to the cowering and inanely grinning Doctor. 'Keep away from us and from the Quarks until you are required,'

he commanded. Then he strode out followed by Toba and the two robots.

When they had gone, Jamie and the Doctor hugged each other in sheer relief.

'Well done, Jamie,' cried the Doctor, dabbing at his face with a large spotted handkerchief, 'but perhaps you were just a trifle too convincing when they ordered you to shoot me!'

'Bloodthirsty lot,' Jamie said with a shudder. 'But what are they after, Doctor?'

‘Judging by that message they sent to their Fleet Leader, I’d guess it’s fuel of some kind.’

‘But why do they want slaves? They’ve got those Quark beasties.’

The Doctor folded his handkerchief thoughtfully into smaller and smaller squares. ‘I wish I knew, Jamie...’ he muttered. ‘One thing is obvious: the Dulcians are in great danger.’ He listened for a moment, then motioned Jamie to follow. ‘They’ve gone. Come on, we must get back to that survey module.’

In the module, Balan and Kando were watching Teel complete a complex graph on a computer screen, their faces registering increasing concern and incomprehension.

Eventually Teel turned to them. ‘It is not logical, but that is the statistical result. There has been a steady decrease in the radiation levels for the past 172 annos...

until now.’

They stared at the display. ‘Now it has suddenly vanished,’ Kando murmured. ‘It is not possible.’

Balan shrugged unhappily. ‘It has happened, therefore it is a fact,’ he informed the two young students. ‘We have discovered that the radiation effects from an atomic detonation endure for 172 annos.’

Teel’s fine, intelligent features puckered with doubt.

‘But what is the explanation?’ he demanded.

Educator Balan raised his hands, palms upwards, in typical Dulcian gesture of resignation. ‘No doubt our experts will explain,’ he replied complacently. ‘It is fruitless for us to seek reasons to prove facts. Facts are truth.’

Teel’s jaw jutted defiantly. ‘I submit that the survey unit must investigate this phenomenon,’ he insisted, springing to his feet. ‘The spacecraft that Kully reported...’

Angrily Bolan cut his pupil short. ‘There is no such craft, Teel. Nor are there any robots.’

‘Oh I wouldn’t bet on that if I were you!’

The three Dulcians spun round to see the Doctor and Jamie just

emerging from the airlock.

‘Kully was right,’ the Doctor continued. ‘There is certainly an alien spacecraft and most definitely there are robots’

‘And you’re all in great danger,’ Jamie added earnestly.

Balan iguorcd these revelations. ‘Your friend Zoe is already at the Capitol and Director Senex will be awaiting your own arrival,’ he informed them. ‘Do not delay.’

The Doctor had caught sight of the graph still glowing on the computer screen. His eyebrows shot up in astonishment. ‘There you are!’ he cried excitedly. ‘Just look at that. You can’t ignore that!’

Swiftly Balan turned and cancelled the display. ‘Please, Doctor, do not waste any more time in this foolishness,’ he pleaded.

The Doctor stared furiously at Balan for several seconds.

‘Quite!’ he suddenly snapped. ‘Come along, Jamie, perhaps Director Senex will listen to us.’

Teel and Kando hurried across to prime the second capsule for launching, while Balan escorted the Doctor and Jamie to the launch tube and programmed the destination panel as they clambered aboard.

‘Capsule primed,’ Teel called out.

‘This will deliver you direct to the Capitol,’ Balan explained, ‘and the Director will see you at his convenience.’

‘The Director will see me *at once*,’ the Doctor retorted as the canopy and access panel zipped shut.

With a hollow screaming noise the capsule shot out of sight along the tube.

Teel and Kando had been eagerly whispering together and they turned as Balan came back into the laboratory section. ‘Now perhaps we can continue with our proper work,’ the Educator sighed.

‘Willingly,’ Kando agreed, glancing covertly at Teel.

‘Permission to commence soil-core sampling?’

‘Granted,’ Balan replied.

Grabbing their equipment, the students almost rushed for the airlock.

‘Wait!’ Balan cried sharply. ‘I shall accompany you, to ensure that nothing distracts you from your tasks...’

Zoe had been wandering impatiently round and round the Council Chamber, now and then glancing hopefully at the wall through which Director Senex had disappeared seemingly hours previously. Kully was lying in his father’s chair, his grubby and bruised legs thrown casually over the arm, idly watching a thin trickle of sand running out of the side of his battered sandals.

‘Oh, why are they taking so long?’ Zoe cried exasperatedly alter a long silence.

Kully yawned. ‘Everything takes time on Dulkis.

Nothing’s eh rushed. Not any more,’ he mumbled.

Zoe clasped and unclasped her hands in frustration. ‘If what you told them about the robots is true...’

‘So even you don’t really believe me,’ Kully said disconsolately.

Zoe tousled her neat black hair. ‘I don’t know. I’m really worried. Jamie and the Doctor should have got here ages ago.’

‘Perhaps my imaginary robots have gobbled them both up!’ Kully chuckled.

Zoe gave a little sigh of apprehension.

‘Sorry,’ Kully said gloomily. ‘You don’t believe me. The Council don’t believe me. It’s my own fault, I suppose.’ He stared at the little heaps of sand on the floor by the chair.

Then he suddenly leaped out of the Director’s seat and grasped Zoe by the shoulders. ‘Would you come back to the Island with me?’ he asked earnestly.

Perplexed and miserable, Zoe gazed listlessly at his grimy bulbous features. ‘Why, what are you going to do?’

‘Bring back some evidence. Make them believe me before it’s too late. Will you come, Zoe?’

Zoe thought for a moment. ‘What kind of evidence?

Anyway, how could we get past your father and the Council out there?’ she objected.

Kully seized her hand and headed straight towards the blank wall of the Chamber. It dissolved in front of them and before she could resist, Kully dragged Zoe through.

‘We’ll go through my father’s private apartments,’ he explained.’ Then we’ll have to steal a capsule somehow...’

Suddenly Kully stopped. ‘Your clothes, Zoe... not exactly Dulcian, are they?’ he said with a frown.

Zoe glanced down at her tee-shirt and slacks and then at Kully’s shapeless, pleated tunic ‘No, I’m glad to say they’re not,’ she retorted indignantly.

‘They’ll give us away. We’ll never get past the Transport Monitors...’ Then Kully’s face brightened. You can borrow something from Zanta! She’s in the Antipodes’

‘Zanta?’ Zoe echoed doubtfully.

‘My younger sister,’ Kully explained. ‘You’re about the same size,’ he grinned. ‘Come on. ’

Five minute, later, as arranged, Zoo met Kully in the curved shimmering corridor outside Senex’s apartments.

Kully whistled approvingly. ‘At least you look more like a girl now.’

Zoe grimaced at her chunky pleats and rather loose sandals. ‘This clobber isn’t very practical, is it?’ she complained.

‘Never mind, you look 90 per cent Dulcian,’ Kully chuckled ‘Your friends won’t recognise you.’

Zoe looked worried.’We’ll probably pass them going in the opposite direction.’

Kully led the way rapidly along the smooth deserted corridor. ‘Luckily I discovered some travel permits in Father’s pockets,’ he whispered, flourishing aome small plastic tokens. ‘All I have to do is forge his signature.’

‘Kully, you’re a shameless villain...’ Zoe giggled admiringly.

you arc an alien imposter,’ Kully grinned, seizing her hand and breaking into a trot...

Their huge figures lit by a lurid multicoloured glow, the Dominators were studying a large seismological map of the Island displayed in fluorescent graphics on a panel in their control centre. Five red stars forming a regular pattern pulsated rhythmically, and complex clusters of symbols and figures flashed up in ever-changing sequences over the map. Beside the display, two Quarks were operating a large computer terminal.

‘Depth of fourth bore revised in accordance with latest seismological data,’ Toba reported in a voice hushed with concentration.

Rago nodded, his leathery face a livid red in the glare from the screen and his green eyes piercingly intent. ‘Link with trajectory angles and collate detonation limits,’ he ordered quietly.

‘Command accepted. Computing now.’

The figures and symbols danced and flickered madly.

‘There must be no error,’ Rago warned in a menacing whisper. ‘There will be no second chance’

At that moment, one of the Quarks sparked and chattered into action. ‘Alien specimens approaching!’ it bleated.

‘Not now!’ Rago breathed venomously. ‘I warned them...

Visual!’ he ordered, turning to the Quark.

The display blacked out and a view of the area around the saucer flashed up in its place. Three white-suited but helmetless figures could be seen descending the slope of the dunes and approaching the Dominators’ craft.

‘Shall we destroy?’ Toba suggested eagerly, trembling with excitement.

‘Negative,’ Rago retorted. ‘These are new specimens.’

He leaned forward in anticipation. ‘They may be from the superior species. Investigate.’

Balan, Kando and Teel stood underneath the saucer, gazing in wonder at the sleek monster towering over them.

‘So Kully was telling the truth,’ Teel murmured, awestruck.

‘Was he?’ Balan said sharply. ‘Then where are the robots?’

Kando glanced down at the maze of parallel tracks leading from the open hatchway at the bottom of the central shaft. ‘Perhaps... perhaps they are inside,’ she suggested nervously.

Balan shook his head dismissively. ‘Why seek unlikely answers to simple problems? This is probably some form of experimental craft being tested by the Technological Committee.’

‘But why is it here on the Island?’ Teel persisted stubbornly.

‘No doubt it is highly secret,’ Bolan warned, turning to leave. ‘Come, we have work to do.’

Kando and Teel stood their ground. ‘Perhaps there has been an accident... a forced landing!’ Kando burst out.

‘Yes, it is our duty to investigate,’ Teel agreed, starting towards the hatchway.

‘There has been no reference to any accident in the Bulletins,’ Balan objected, ‘and I forbid you to interfere.’

‘If it is secret the Bulletins will not refer to it,’ Teel answered triumphantly.

Kando joined him, her beautiful eyes alive with excitement ‘We must investigate,’ she urged.

Warily the two students stepped into the cylindrical chamber. Speechless with rage Balan came hurrying after them. No sooner had he entered than the hatch slid shut with a slick whirr and the floor immediately heaved under their feet as the elevator bore them rapidly up into the saucer.

The three Dulcians stared around them open-mouthed as they stepped our into the deserted control centre, echoing and dark.

‘This is not the technology of Dulkis...’ Teel murmured almost reverently, gesturing at the crystal mosaic sphere glittering on the central control column.

Still struck dumb with amazement, Balan walked slowly over to the dais and grasped the slim rail surrounding it or support. From the shadows came a shrill giggling.

Something glowed red and a nauseating throbbing burst our. Balan went chalk white and tried to let go of the rail.

'I... I cannot move...' he stuttered, gaping in utter terror at his shocked pupils.

The throbbing was repeated and Teel was flung across the chamber and pinned helplessly to the wall. Kando screamed in panic as two whirring, chattering machines with flashing antennae marched out of the gloom towards her. Slowly she backed away.

'Stand still!' croaked a hollow alien voice and Toba strode into the chamber hunched in his carapace of armoured plates.

Then Rago entered, his suit creaking menacingly as he loomed over Balan. The terrified Educator's mouth moved but no words emerged, only strange incoherent sounds.

His eyes were bloodshot and popping out of his head.

'You... you are not Dulcians,' Teel gasped, his slim body crumpled against the panel.

'Quark!' Toba harked.

The wall panel swung Teel like a dummy and suspended him horizontally while the globular apparatus descended over him. Then the Quark connected its probes into the bottom edge of the pallet.

Activate!' Toba ordered.

Teel was bathed in the bluish aura as Rago fitted the visor over his head and strode over to examine the new specimen. 'As I anticipated, this one is different,' Rago reported with a grunt of satisfaction. 'Greater brain capacity... Two hearts... No superfluous internal organs...

Limited potential for physical activity...' After a few minutes he straightened up and took off the visor.

'Affirmative. There are two species, Neither presents any threat to us.'

Toba was staring at Kando's cowering figure beside the other Quark.

‘Then we shall be able to assemble a labour force?’

‘Affirmative. Of limited performance, but adequate,’

Rago decided. ‘We shall require the oscillation and the central bore target to be cleared of debris. Search the Island. Round up all specimens.’

‘Command accepted,’ Toba acknowledged eagerly.

When Toba had left, Rago resumed his investigation of the semi-conscious Teel.

‘I do not understand...’ Balan wailed, still helplessly stuck to the rail of the dais by molecular adhesion. ‘Why should they wish to harm us?’

Dazed with shock, Kando shook her head. Then she began to whimper with terror as Rago turned his attention to her, his huge green eye swollen like that of some monstrous Cyclops by the lenses of the visor.

‘Muscular development relatively retarded,’ the creaking giant rasped, stooping over her. ‘However, endurance can be tested. It should prove a most informative experiment...’

5

Slavery

After the capsule had screamed to a shuddering halt inside the terminal tube in the survey module, Kully gallantly offered to help Zoe disembark, but the independent young human jumped lightly out, none the worse for her second turbulent trip. They looked around the deserted module with a mounting sense of foreboding.

‘Where is everybody?’ murmured Zoe. ‘What do you think can have happened?’

Kully glanced over the quietly humming systems monitors and shrugged. ‘We’d better take a look outside.’

Just then Zoe glimpsed something through the small porthole nearest her. ‘What on earth is that?’ she exclaimed, leaning forward. Then she caught sight of a similar object through the neighbouring porthole. She ran from porthole to porthole and then turned slowly to face Kully as hot and cold pins and needles prickled the back of her neck. ‘We seem... we seem to be completely surrounded...’ she gasped.

As Kully scrambled to see for himself, a chorus of unearthly noises briefly penetrated the hull of the module.

An nstant later, the whole structure shuddered and several equipment panels burst into showers of sparks.

Momentarily frozen with terror, Kully stared at the encircling Quarks inexorably closing in on them with throbbing probes and threshing antennae. Then he dived towards the airlock, yelling at Zoe to follow. Frantically he pressed and twisted and thumped the switches, but the door remained shut. Dense clouds of black smoke began to billow out of the shattered panels.

Again the module shuddered, this time tipping over at an alarming angle before settling back in a series of violent rocking movements.

'We're trapped... we're trapped...' Kully shrieked, before being racked by a fit of retching and coughing.

A third time the module shook and then it rolled over and over several times like a barel, flinging Zoe and Kully around like rag dolls. The din was appalling as they alternately screamed and choked in the deadly fumes, while the structure rapidly started to collapse around them.

When the module finally came to rest, the two prisoners felt blindly about in the poisonous darkness, their ears numbed by the prodigious reverberations of the battered hull.

Eventually they found each other. 'Maybe you'll believe in my robots now...' Kully gasped, clasping Zoe round the waist with one arm and feeling with his free hand for the airlock controls.

'What about the capsule thing?' Zoe panted through her handkerchief.

'Can't navigate... even if it still works... we'd end up back in the Capitol,' spluttered Kully, jiggling the switches in vain.

'Better than being cooked in here.'

Desperately Kully levered with his fingernails around the tightly sealed edge of the airlock, but it was impossible to budge it.

Zoe sank to her knees, her lungs burning. 'I...I just can't breathe...' she croaked piteously, doubled in agony.

A few seconds later, Kully collapsed against the airlock panel.

Outside, standing hunched on the dunes like a huge rearing turtle, Toba ordered the circle of Quarks to recharge their probes. A tremor of pleasure ran through his massive frame as the robots bleated and sparked in unison around the scorched hulk of the module.

'And now omplete destruction!' he commanded, in a frenzy of hatred and power.

'Negative. Command negated!' Rago thundered, striding up behind his unwitting Probationer.

The Quarks clattered and buzzed in confusion and then fell silent.

Toba swung violently round. 'Intention was to prevent escape of any specimens,' he blustered feebly.

'Your obsession with destruction has seriously depleted Quark power reserves,' hissed Rag.. 'Did you examine the craft?'

'All data has been recorded,' Toba claimed. 'The craft was empty.'

Rago stared briefly at the blistered wreck. 'Bring any further specimens to me intact at once,' he ordered. 'And Toba – I do not expect to have to correct you again.'

The Probationer glared at his superior from beneath lowered eyelids. 'Command accepted,' he whispered hoarsely.

Rago nodded curtly and strode away.

Toba had just started organising the squad of robots to continue the search of the Island when he suddenly noticed that the outer airlock door had opened in the hull of the module, releasing a huge pall of acrid black smoke.

Then, to his astonishment, two dazed figures crawled slowly out and lay panting feverishly in the sand.

When at last they managed to raise their heads, Zoe and Kully found themselves staring at a semicircle of Quarks with Toba's towering frame in the centre relentlessly bearing down on them. With a gigantic effort Kully turned to Zoe. ' *Now* perhaps you will believe me...' he whispered.

Bovem met the Doctor and Jamie at the capsule terminal in the

Capitol. As he hurried them along endless gleaming corridors to the Council Chamber, they tried to find out what had happened to Zoe but without success.

Bovem seemed very evasive.

'Director Senex will explain, should he consider it fitting,' Bovem told them soothingly as he ushered them into the Antechamber. 'I shall announce your arrival.'

As they waited for what seemed like ages to be admitted, Jamie paced restlessly up and down. 'Where d'ye think the wee lassie can be, Doctor?' he asked anxiously. 'D'ye think they're holding her hostage or something?'

The Doctor roused himself from his reverie. 'Oh I'm sure the Dulcians wouldn't harm her, Jamie.'

The tough young Scot gritted his teeth. 'They'd better not!' he muttered grimly.

Eventually they were summoned. They found themselves standing in the Council Chamber surrounded by a dozen elderly dignitaries. The Doctor looked impatient and uncomfortable under the steady gaze of Director Senex and made a feeble attempt to smooth his dusty, rumpled clothes and hair. Jamie simply stared around him with barely disguised contempt.

At last Senex spoke. 'As far as the Council is aware, your friend has left the Capitol in the company of my son Kelly,' he blandly informed them. 'Presumably they returned to the Island.'

'Why did ye no tell us before?' Jamie shouted indignantly. 'Come on, Doctor...' Jamie looked for a doorway in vain.

'That would not be advisable,' Senex warned quietly.

Jamie's blue eyes blazed defiantly. 'Ye mean we're prisoners?'

A murmur of protest ran round the noble assembly.

'There are no prisoners here,' Senex replied calmly.

The Doctor quickly intervened. 'There's no need, Jamie,' he explained tactfully. 'Dulcian society is totally pacifist.'

Jamie grimaced. 'Then how are they going to fight those Dominators

and their Quarks?' he demanded.

The Director sat upright in his luxurious chair. 'It would seem to be true that you come from another planet,'

he announced.

'So do the Dominators,' said the Doctor earnestly. 'We have seen them. We were taken inside their craft. They are utterly callous and they are here on Dulkis for some sinister purpose.'

The Councillors began stirring uneasily in their reclining seats. Senex called for order and was instantly obeyed. He turned and courteously addressed the Doctor.

'We should be grateful if you would inform us what has occured on the Island,' he declared.

'Och not again,' Jamie exploded. 'We're hanging aboot blethering and Zoe's in danger...'

With phenomenal patience the Doctor briefly recounted events since the TARDIS had materialised on the Island.

'... and once the physiological tests were completed...

well, they let us go,' he concluded at last Senex appeared to be convinced. 'Did you discover the purpose of these tests, Doctor?' he asked.

'To see if we were clever enough to be useful,' Jamie spelt out with painstaking rudeness.

'Evidently you were!' Deputy Bosem retorted.

Before the quick-tempered Highlander could bite the bait, the Doctor again intervened. 'With respect, Director Senex, I know that it is the Dulcian custom to deliberate and discuss at leisure, but the situation is urgent. Send someone to the Island to confirm our story,' he pleaded.

'Aye, and we'll be organising a way to defeat these Dominators,' Jamie added with relish.

The Director raised his hands, palms upward. 'The Dominators let you go free, so why should we fear them?'

he demanded simply.

The Doctor adopted a menacing air. ‘Don’t expect them to think and act as you do,’ he murmured, leaning very close to Senex. ‘They are aliens. From another world.’

Senex smiled. ‘So are you, Doctor.’

Disconcerted, the Doctor blinked and retreated a little.

Senex inclined his head kindly, as though he were talking to a small child. ‘What could such aliens possibly want from Dulkis?’

The Doctor frowned. ‘Well, they talked about refuelling their fleet...’

The Director laughed: ‘We have no suitable minerals here. The aliens are welcome to whatever they can use,’ he said, to murmurs of agreement from the Councillors.

TheDoctor shook his head thoughtfully. ‘There is the puzzle about the disappearance of radiation from the Island,’ he mused. ‘Perhaps that is what they came for...’

Senex shrugged. ‘That is no cause for alarm, Doctor.

Why seek menace where there may be none?’

The Doctor bit his lip for a moment, restraining his growing frustration. ‘I am only guessing,’ he went on. ‘And there is the possibility that they are slavers – recruiting for some vast project.’

‘You can’t just sit here and do nothing!’ Jamie shouted.

‘Better do nothing than do the wrong thing,’ remarked an aged member in a wavering croak.

Senex held up his hand. ‘What do you suggest we do?’

he asked the irate young Scot.

‘First send an armed force to rescue Zoe and Kully...’

Jamie began eagerly.

‘An *armed* force?’ Bovem echoed in astonishment.

‘Impossible.’

Outraged voices broke out all around the Chamber.

‘For decades we have lived in peace,’ Senex calmly replied. ‘We have proved that universal restraint eliminates aggression.’

‘Och, just try telling the Dominators that!’ retorted Jamie scornfully.

The Doctor stirred himself into action. ‘Jamie’s right. I suggest you contact Balan on the Island – at least he might have some more news by now,’ he proposed earnestly.

After a pause, Senex touched a button on his video panel. Amidst a snowstorm of interference, the interior of the survey module flickered unsteadily onto the miniature screen. There was a gasp of horror as the Councillors stared at their was individual monitors. The images showed a total ruin, a blackened pile of wreckage.

Senex panned the scanner calling agitatedly for Balan over the audio link. There was no reply, only a rush of static. The remains of the module seemed deserted.

Sadly the Doctor hung his head. ‘I’m afraid it’s too late.

I did try to warn you.’

‘What... what is that?’ Bovem suddenly cried, pointing at his monitor.

Through the open airlock, a squat mechanical figure was entering the module, its antennae flashing and its probes twitching eagerly.

‘That’s a Quark! One of the robots,’ the Doctor exclaimed.

‘A Quark... and you let Zoe go back there!’ Jamie yelled at the dumbstruck Council. He grabbed the Doctor’s arm and started to drag him away. ‘We must go back, Doctor!

We canna waste any more rime!’

The Doctor held back a moment, staring intently at the screens. They all watched fascinated as the Quark suddenly seemed to notice the scanner. Its antennae sparked even more ferociously and its manic bleating to a frenzied climax as it approached, growing larger and larger on the screens. Its glowing probes reached out towards the speechless watchers. Then the screens fizzled and went blank.

The Doctor glanced around the stunned and silent assembly. ‘Now will you believe us?’ he whispered hoarsely. Then he and Jamie dashed out of the Chamber.

Jamie was soon sitting glumly in the rear seat of a transit capsule while in front the Doctor desperately tried to remember how to operate the machine.

'I suppose you know what you're doing,' Jamie muttered apprehensively.

'Oh yes. It's just a matter of the correct sequence of switches,' the Doctor reassured him.

Jamie leaned forward. 'No, no. I mean this contraption's heading back to the survey ship, right?'

'Well, I certainly hope it is Jamie. Why?'

'Och nothing,' Jamie shrugged. 'Just that there's an angry Quark waiting there to meet us...'

'Oh dear,' the Doctor muttered. 'So there is.'

Toba and the Quarks had escorted Zoe and Kully across the weltering dunes to the ruined museum. Ragged and exhausted, the two prisoners now stood in the blistering heat of the Dulcian noon, awaiting their fate with as much courage as they could muster. For some time Zoe had been stealing glances at their Quark guardians.

'Any idea how they're powered?' she whispered to Kully. 'If we knew, we might be able to sabotage them.'

'Wouldn't stand a chance,' Kully muttered, 'they're deadly.'

'They're only robots,' Zoe murmured, suddenly remembering the laser gun and the other weapons inside the ruin. 'Kully, I think we stand a chance...' she breathed hopefully. The nearest Quark emitted a threatening buzz.

'Attack them? Are you out of your mind, Zoe?' Kully retorted through clenched teeth.

At that moment, Rago and Toha came striding over the sandhills followed by Teel, Kando and Balan with a Quark escort. The prisoners were all herded together and the Dominators surveyed the small band of slaves.

'Work potential and stamina to be recorded for analysis; Rago commanded.

‘Affirmative,’ Toba responded eagerly. ‘But if any try to escape...’

‘No action. Report to me,’ Rago insisted.

The prisoners watched as the two huge figures faced each other breathing heavily, manoeuvring for supremacy.

‘Toba!’

‘Command accepted,’ Toba conceded alter a long pause.

Rago threw him a cold emerald glare and then marched off, followed by all but two of the Quarks.

Toba slowly circled round the huddled captives, a hideous smile warping his leathern face. Then he addressed them in a hushed voice almost choked with excitement. ‘If the tests prove favourable, you may be chosen to serve the Dominators,’ he breathed.

‘Dominators? Who on earth are they?’ piped up Zoe innocently.

Toba swung round and bore down on her. ‘Do not ever interrupt me again,’ he whispered hoarsely, his warm acid breath making Zoe flinch in disgust. Toba resumed his circling. ‘We are the Masters of the Ten Galaxies.’

‘And we’re the Dulcians,’ Kully blurted out, ‘and we don’t serve anybody.’

The huge creaking figure towered over the plump little Dulcian. ‘You will clear and prepare this site for drilling,’

Toba rasped, gesturing at the rubble-strewn ground surrounding the star-shaped target.

‘And if we don’t?’ Zoe challenged.

‘You will be destroyed,’ Toba hissed with obvious delight. ‘So remember – you are working for your lives.’

‘Well, I’m certainly not working for you,’ Zoe snapped defiantly.

‘Quarks!’ Toba screamed. A shiver whipped up Zoe’s spine as she heard the demented giggling and saw the ominous sparking emitted by the two robots as they stomped forward. Toba watched with a sadistic smile as the Quarks drove the five prisoners towards the scattered debris and forced them to form a short chain-gang.

Exhausted and cowed, Balan reluctantly stooped, picked up a small lump of concrete and passed it along the chain.

At the other end, Teel heaved the block as far as he could away into the sand. Then the futile action was repeated, over and er again. For a while Toba gloated over their struggles with heavy slabs and twisted girders, and then marched away towards the distant saucer.

As they sweated and strained in the heat and the soft shifting sand, under the impassive, unblinking gaze of the Quarks, Zoe desperately tried to think. ‘There are only two of these tin soldiers, but there are five of us,’ she eventually murmured to the others. ‘We’ve got to get away.’

‘Where would we go?’ Kando asked. ‘We cannot leave the Island.’

‘Perhaps the Capitol will send help,’ Teel suggested.

Kully staggered under an awkwardly twisted beam.

‘What... what can they do?’ he panted. ‘We’ve got to get ourselves out of this mess.’

‘Exactly what I intend to do,’ Zoe agreed. ‘How fast can these clockwork soldiers move, Kully?’

Balan stopped work and leaned on Zoe’s shoulder. ‘I cannot allow you to incite my students to rebellion,’ he protested weakly, ‘it will only lead to violence.’

‘And submission will only lead to slavery’ Zoe retorted.

‘What do you say, Kully?’

Kully nodded eagerly and turned to Kando.

‘No, Balan is right,’ gasped the tall Dulcian girl, trying to lift the slab Balan had just dropped. ‘Violence breeds violence.’

Kully turned earnestly to Teel who was struggling to pull a thick steel rod out of the sand. Teel paused, glancing uncomfortably at Balan and Kando. ‘I understand your arguments but meek submission is humiliating,’ he muttered resolutely. ‘I am with Zoe and Kully.’

A spectacular discharge of sparks burst among the Quarks’ antennae and they lumbered nearer, bleating suspiciously...

As the Capsule hurtled through the Dulcian sky, Jamie craned over the Doctor’s shoulder, his face frozen with horror. The Doctor had removed the instrument panel in front of him and was poking about in the tangle of wires.

‘Have ye gone daft or something?’ Jamie shouted above the harsh whining and buffeting of the craft.

‘No, no, Jamie, all I’ve got to do is to... oh dear...’ cried the Doctor in dismay, swapping a few connections over.

‘But ye canna just take this contraption to bits in mid air; Jamie protested.

The Doctor pressed a switch, then another and shook his head. ‘But we don’t want to land in the middle of all those Quark things as you yourself pointed out,’ he shouted, changing the wires over again. ‘Don’t worry Jamie, all I have to do is over-ride the autopilot.’

At that moment the capsule started looping in a terrifying corkscrew pattern. Jame held on to his stomach and closed his eyes. ‘But... are there no any ordinary controls?’ he yelled in anguish as they spiralled round and round.

The Doctor handed Jamie a spaghetti-like bundle of wires over has shoulder. ‘Here, hold this, there’s a good chap,’ he cried.

Jamie grabbed the tangle and the Doctor immediately dived off his seat and began wriggling his way forward into the nose cone. At once

the capsule started bucking and rearing like a fairground machine. Jamie felt decidedly sick as he watched the Doctor's legs waving around every time the craft took a sudden dizzy plunge. 'What are ye doing in there?' he shouted anxiously.

There was an incomprehensible series of muffled comments as the Doctor twisted this way and that. 'Think I've got it!' he eventually declared, shuffling backwards into the cockpit clutching several printed circuits and even more tangles of wire. 'Anyway there won't be time for a second try,' he cried cheerfully manoeuvring himself hack into his seat. 'Now I'm going to attempt to steer this thing.'

The Doctor fiddled with the circuits for a few seconds.

All at once the capsule gave a bone-numbing lurch and then steadied itself again.

'We'll be down in no time at all, Jamie.'

'Aye, but in one piece?'

'Hang on!' the Doctor yelled as the craft tipped almost vertically and accelerated downwards at a phenomenal rate.

'We'll soon find out.'

The capsule fell for what seemed an eternity. Then very gradually the nose came up and it levelled out. Soon they were skidding along in the sand with a deafening roaring and scraping.

'Yippee!' cried the Doctor, still fiddling with the circuitry.

Finally the capsule crunched to a halt underneath the cliffs. Opening the canopy, the Doctor leaped out nimbly.

'Look, no Quarks!' he cried triumphantly. 'I think we've done rather well so far.' He sniffed the air a few times.

'This way, I think,' he declared, starting to scramble up the face of the cliff.

After an arduous, sticky climb they followed the crumbling ridge for a few hundred metres and then suddenly found themselves looking down on the ruined museum. The Doctor drew a bent and battered telescope out of his pocket and peered through it.

'What can ye see?' Jamie demanded impatiently, snatching the

instrument ‘It’s Zoe and Kully and the others!’ he exclaimed, overjoyed. ‘Let’s go, Doctor.’

‘Wait!’ the Doctor commanded sternly, taking the telescope and quickly scanning the area. ‘We’ll split up and work our way round separately from behind them, just in case. I’ll follow the ridge for a bit first. You go down that way...’

Under the cliff, the five prisoners had resumed their task.

Although Balan and Kando could hardly manage to shift anything at all, Zoe Kully and Teel put on a convincing show while secretly whispering among themselves.

‘Have you got any ideas?’ Kully asked. ‘We must be quick or the others will be too exhausted to move.’

‘There’s a laser gun in that museum place. We’ve got to get hold of it somehow,’ Zoc murmured.

Teel bent down beside them. There is only one Quark now,’ he said.

Cautiously they looked up. One of the robots had moved over to the drilling target to take soundings and measurements.

With a muffled gasp, Balan suddenly fell to his knees. ‘I am... I am sorry,’ he panted pitifully.

Their Quark sentry tramped over to examine the fallen Dulcian. ‘Is this specimen broken?’ it bleated harshly.

‘Move it aside and resume working.’

Zoe winked significantly at Kully and Teel, then she and Kando helped Balan over to the shadowed area by the remains of the museum entrance and propped him up against the wall.

Meanwhile the Quark transmitted a terse report to its masters. ‘Initial assessment: o specimen broken. Three others showing signs of unserviceabilitv. Only one still performing at high efficiency.’ it screeched.

‘That will be one of the males,’ Rago’s voice observed through the Quark’s audio circuit.

‘Correction. A female,’ retorted the robot.

‘The name’s Zoe...’ Zoe muttered to herself as she knelt beside Balan, keeping her eyes glued on the chattering Quark.

‘Work the specimens to exhaustion,’ Rago ordered brutally. ‘Record the times of collapse.’

Kully had been watching Zoe’s movements like a hawk.

Now he positioned himself so that he blocked the Quark’s view of the museum entrance. Nearby, Teel redoubled his efforts dislodging the steel rods to distract the machine’s attention.

Very slowly Zoe stood up and started to back into the gaping doorway. The Quark was still preoccupied observing Teel’s valiant struggles... a few more backward steps and she would be within reach of the laser gun.

Suddenly Kully realised that he could only see one Quark, the one he was blocking. He glanced fearfully round, the Quark by the target had disappeared. He tried to call out a warning to Zoe, but his throat felt like sandpaper and no sound came.

Zoe took three more paces and then her heart froze as she heard an unearthly giggling and sparking behind her.

She stopped dead. A scream flew to her lips but was never uttered. Without looking round, she began to walk slowly forward again into the open, with the robot’s mechanical footsteps shaking the floor beneath her as it followed. At every step she expected the Quark’s glowing probes to discharge their murderous ultrasonic quanta and to smash her body to fragments.

6

Fighting Back

In the cool Capitol the Councillors were locked in dispute with their Director. Senex seemed to be reconciling himself to the need for action, whereas Bovem led a majority in favour of doing nothing.

‘We must hope that the Doctor will succeed in devising an effective course of action,’ Senex stated firmly.

‘With respect, I am reluctant to rely upon the assistance of an alien,’ Deputy Bovem objected. ‘We should support the recommendations of the Emergency Committee.’

‘Chairman Tensa is able,’ Senex agreed, ‘but can he deal with this unprecedented crisis?’

Bovem looked shocked. ‘Tensa has proved his competence dealing with floods, droughts, earthquakes…’

he protested.

The Director smiled indulgently. ‘All *natural* disasters, Bovem, not the result of aggressive intelligences.’

At that moment the wall parted and a surprisingly robust young Dulcian entered with an of determined ability. A grateful sigh of relief rose from the troubled Councillors, as though all their problems were solved at last. They sat up expectantly.

Tensa looked at them gravely. ‘We have three alternatives,’ he announced abruptly. ‘If these aliens are indeed hostile – which has not been proved beyond question – we can fight, we can flee or we can submit.’

There was a doomed silence. The Councillors waited, as if hoping for more, for some magical solution. Tensa remained silent.

Senex rose slowly to his feet. ‘We cannot fight, we are not able. We cannot flee, there is no refuge. We can submit, but to what?’

‘Who knows?’ Tensa replied curtly.

The assembly stared aghast at Chairman Tensa, as though all their trust and expectations had been betrayed.

Eventually the Director sank back into his luxurious chair.

‘So we can only wait…’ he concluded.

Fortunately for Zoe, Kando had fainted and fallen on her face in the burning sand, and her collapse had distracted the Quark from Zoe’s suspicious behaviour. Having revived Kando and laid her next to Balan by the museum entrance, the others carried on the struggle to clear the drilling site, though Teel was getting rapidly weaker from the unaccustomed physical exertion. Determined as ever, Kully and Zoe had soon devised another escape plan.

‘So all we need now is somewhere we can hide…’ Kully whispered.

‘The bomb shelter,’ Teel suddenly muttered. ‘I am sure they built

one... part of the atom tests.'

Kully glanced surreptitiously at the Quarks. 'Where is it?' he asked, passing Teel a jagged sheet of metal.

Teel shrugged apologetically and shook his head.

'Fat lot of use!' snapped Zoe irritably. 'Listen Kully, once inside, give me time to get the Quarks into your line of fire.'

'Don't forget to duck,' Kully joked under his breath, heaving a slab onto his shoulder and bending at the knees.

'Wish me luck.'

'Don't forget to point the gun the right way,' Zoe muttered anxiously.

Kully staggered a few paces with his burden, then he groaned dramatically, stumbled and fell.

Immediately the two Quarks stomped over to him.

'Specimen has failed,' one bleated.

'Join the other failed specimens!' screeched the second.

With grossly exaggerated effort, Kully dragged himself painfully across to the entrance and lay dawn in the shade beside Balan and Kando. Meanwhile, closely watched by the Quarks, Zoe picked up the slab Kully had dropped and struggled on.

Balan clutched feebly at Kully's sleeve. 'This is mere foolishness. You cannot possibly succeed,' he croaked.

But the plucky little Dulcian chose his moment and then crawled swiftly into the ruin. Once inside, he heaved the splintered remains of the door shut as best he could and then scuttled among the showcases, feverishly searching in the semi-darkness for the laser gun Zoe had described. At last he found it where Rago had thrown it down earlier. Holding the unfamiliar device out in front of him with his face averted, Kully cautiously approached the crumbling window, racking his brains to remember the detailed instructions Zoe had given him.

Outside, Zoe staggered along under the concrete slab, followed at a short distance by the two Quarks monitoring her progress. As she gradually drew level with the window, she glimpsed Kully out of the corner of her eve levelling the laser gun through the ragged hole in

the wall. As arranged, she stumbled a few more paces and then sank to her knees with a moan.

‘One more specimen has failed,’ screeched a Quark.

‘Fire, Kully, fire..’ Zoe muttered between her teeth, anxiously awaiting the whirr and slam of the laser.

Sweat streamed into Kully’s eyes and his hands shook violently as he forced himself to operate the primer and poised his finger on the trigger, fighting to steady himself to fire.

Sensing that something was wrong, Teel let out a shuddering cry and crumpled to the ground.

‘All specimens have failed,’ the Quarks trumpeted. ‘All specimens stand up!’

‘Why don’t you fire?’ Zoe groaned, her eyes tightly closed and the hair on her neck prickling with suspense as she defied the Quarks’ command as long as she dared. Still nothing happened.

Propped against the window frame, Kully had taken aim at the Quark nearest to Zoe’s slumped figure. Just as he was about to press the trigger button, a brawny hand reached over his shoulder and yanked the weapon savagely aside.

‘What d’ye think ye’re doing... Zoe’s oot there!’ a shocked voice bleated into his ear.

Spinning round, Kully came face to face with Jamie. ‘I know that, you fool, I was aiming at the Quarks!’ he hissed.

Turning back, Kully hurriedly took aim again.

Outside, Balan, Kando, Teel and Zoe had all obediently got to their feet and were now directly in the line of fire.

‘It’s no good. I’ve lost my chance,’ Kully fumed resentfully.

Jamie looked ashamed. ‘Sorry,’ he mumbled.

The Quarks had herded their captives together.

‘Specimens will be returned to Dominator Rago,’ one of them screeched in a voice like a knife-blade on glass.

Suddenly the other Quark sparked and giggled madly.

‘One specimen is missing... the specimen Kully,’ it shrieked, stomping frantically round and round the pathetic huddle.

‘Now Balan’s in the way,’ Kully muttered, still squinting hopelessly through the sights.

Jamie put a restraining hand on his arm. ‘Aye, well maybe it’s no such a guid idea,’ he said doubtfully. ‘I think we should wait till the Doctor gets here.’

‘He’d better be quick,’ Kully snapped testily, ‘because those Quarks will he after me any second now.’

At that moment the Doctor was very close, keeping a sharp look-out for Jamie as he darted along the base of the cliffs towards the ruin and stopping every few metres to spy out the land. Suddenly he saw a straggling group of Dulcians approaching, escorted by two Quarks. Among them he recognised Zoe, looking dazed and unhappy in her borrowed attire. The Doctor shrank into a hollow and tried to think, but almost at once a familiar tramping sound behind him sent his spirits plunging even further. Before he could move, a sizzling bang brought down part of the sandstone overhang around him so that he was buried up to his waist and immobilised.

‘You were ordered to keep away from our operations,’

Toba snarled, striding up followed by several Quarks.

The Doctor twisted awkwardly round and grinned sheepishly. ‘I do try to, but everywhere I go I bump into Quarks and things, all over the Island. Where can I go?’ he whined pathetically, cowering before the mighty Dominator.

Toba’s green eyes bore fiercely into him for several seconds and the Doctor began to fear that his pretence was about to be exposed. Just then the group from the drilling site stumbled up the slope on its way to the saucer. Zoe stared at the half-buried Doctor with a mixture of horror and relief, but she dared not call out or break rank. For his part, the Doctor was relieved to see that Jamie was not among the party, but Zoe’s plight filled him with anxiety.

All at once Toba ordered the procession to stop. ‘One of the specimens is missing,’ he hissed.

‘Specimen Kully has escaped,’ bleated one of the Quarks.

To the Doctor’s surprise, a smile of satisfaction cracked its way across Toba’s waxen features. The Dominator jabbed a creaking glove towards him. ‘Take this cretin with the other specimens to Dominator Rego,’ he commanded.

In vain the Doctor attempted to heave himself out of the mound of sand. Leaning forward, Toba grasped his coat by the lapels and dragged him effortlessly clear. Meekly the Doctor scurried over and, with a crafty wink at Zoe, joined the procession. The two Quarks immediately whirred into motion again, driving their captives away across the dunes.

Ordering his squad of Quarks to follow, Toba set off eagerly down the slope towards the ruin.

Inside the museum, Jamie and Kully waited in gloomy silence – Jamie sprawling morosely on a fallen beam and Kully wandering aimlessly about lamenting his humiliating failure with the laser gun.

Eventually Kully could bear the suspense no more. ‘We daren’t wait any longer. Something must have happened to the Doctor,’ he murmured.

Before Jamie could reply they heard a movement outside the ruin.

Kully turned expectantly to the window and was about to call out ‘Doctor’ when the sturdy Scot leaped on him, clamped a hand over his mouth and they both hit the floor like a couple of sandbags.

‘Kully... I know you are there!’ Toba’s voice thundered, making the showcases rattle around them.

They lay listening to the crazed giggling of the Quarks’

circuitry, their hearts pounding fit to burst.

‘Do... do you think he saw me...?’ asked Kully weakly.

‘Ah telt ye to keep away frae the windy,’ Jamie muttered savagely. ‘Gimme that thing...’ and he snatched the laser gun from the trembling Dulcian.

Outside the ruin, flanked by his Quarks, Toba’s enormous frame was twitching with excitement. ‘Now you will learn the consequences

when a Dominator is disobeyed,' he screamed. Quarks! Destroy!'

There was a sickening slamming noise and the doorway completely disintegrated leaving a gaping hole in the wall.

Kully clutched Jamie's arm, wide-eyed with terror.

Shaking free, Jamie scrambled to his knees, crawled swiftly across to the window and leaped to his feet, flattening himself beside the edge of the frame. With deft, rapid movements he primed the laser, aimed and fired several short sharp bursts.

The Quark nearest to Toba exploded in a shower of molten components and clouds of treacly smoke.

For a moment Toba was paralysed with astonishment and rage. Then he hunched behind the semicircle of Quarks and rapped out a string of hysterical orders: 'All units. Total destruction. Utter annihilation. Death! Death!

Death!'

Ear-splitting whines rent the air and then the Quarks'

deadly ultrasonic bolts began streaming relentlessly into the ruined building. Taking terrible risks, Jamie dodged around the window frame desperately trying to get another shot at the screaming Dominator and his sizzling robots.

But the air was soon filled with choking dust and smoke and murderously sharp fragments of stone and metal whizzing in all directions.

'If only I could *see* them...' Jamie yelled in frustration, firing the laser at random in the hope of hitting something.

All at once there was a terrible crash behind him and he whipped round to see that Kully had been pinned underneath a huge beam as a section of the roof had collapsed. Dropping the gun, Jamie scrambled over and vainly tried to shift the huge concrete rafter. Then he had a brainwave. Grabbing the laser, he carefully aimed it at the beam close to Kully's quaking body. As the helpless Dulcian stared at him in abject terror, Jamie fired the laser with just enough blast to shatter the rafter in two. Then he threw all his weight against the lighter section and it slid off, setting Kully free... miraculously he had not been crushed, only dazed.

‘Let’s get out of here; Jamie yelled above the colossal din of the Quarks’ barrage and the collapsing building.

Suddenly Kully grabbed his arm. ‘This way!’ he shouted, dragging the protesting Highlander under a tangle of criss-crossed beams just at the same instant as the whole front wall of the museum caved inwards and the remains of the roof hurtled downwards. Seconds later there was a titanic explosion and the wreckage of the museum blew apart in a searing hail of fire and debris.

When the smoke and the dust had cleared, the museum no longer existed. Nothing moved in the devastation spread around on the sand.

‘Destruction completed,’ Toba breathed, his voice hushed with malicious satisfaction. Then, followed by the surviving Quarks, he turned abruptly and strode away.

After an exhausting trek from the drilling site, the Doctor and Zoe together with Balan, Kando and Teel, were herded into the control centre in the saucer. As soon as the Quarks had delivered their reports to Rago, the atmosphere became electric as Probationer Toba faced his superior defiantly.

‘You deliberately disobeyed my instructions.’ Rago fumed. ‘You asked power destroying the structure and the specimen Kully.’

‘And possibly my young friend Jamie!’ the Doctor shouted, his face contorted with rage and sorrow.

Zoe gazed at the Doctor in horror.

Toba’s eyes clouded with cunning. ‘My life was threatened and a Quark was destroyed.’

‘The result of your own negligence,’ Rago retorted.

Toba smiled a nightmare smile. ‘Does the Navigator suggest that I should have allowed the specimen to escape?’

‘This is an Island. The specimens cannot escape,’ Rago sneered. He turned to the Quark escort. ‘Take the specimens to the central bore and prepare the target for drilling. The inferior specimens will remain here,’ he added, indicating Zoe and the Doctor.

The dusty haggard figures of Balan, Kando and Teel were driven roughly out of the control centre by the two Quarks. Zoe and the

Doctor lingered apprehensively under the glinting gaze of another robot. Zoe was almost frantic with concern for Jamie, but as soon as she tried to question the Doctor he put his finger to his lips and nodded warningly towards Rago and Toba.

The two Dominators had moved across the chamber to the Quark control unit on the far side. A vivid red symbol representing the robot destroyed by Jamie was pulsing among row upon row of green symbols denoting serviceable Quarks. 'Probationer Toba, I begin to question whether you possess the qualities of intelligence and detachment vital in a Dominator,' Rago rapped out with exaggerated disdain. 'You have repeatedly destroyed the creatures and installations of this planet, and squandered vital Quark resources to no useful purpose, merely to gratify your lust for destruction.'

Toba gestured defiantly at the huge navigation charts glowing on the panels behind them. 'Was it by weakness and indecision that the Dominators mastered the Ten Galaxies?' he demanded.

Rago stiffened. 'It was by rational ruthlessness,' he retorted, his eyes ablaze with fanatical certainty. 'What threatens us, we destroy. What can serve us, we exploit.

Everything else, we ignore.'

'Well, at least we're honest,' murmured the Doctor wryly, listening intently.

'But the primitives have disobeyed us. They have attacked and we do not know what the superior aliens may be planning elsewhere on the planet,' Toba protested.

'I alone am competent to assess such matters,' Rago thundered. 'I shall report your conduct to Fleet Leader.'

'And I shall protest at yours,' Tuba shouted 'You have jeopardised our mission by weakness. You have humiliated me before interior creatures...'

Rago thrust his creaking, leathery face close to Toba's.

'It is not unknown for mutinous subordinates to be executed,' he hissed.

'Nor is it unknown for an incompetent superior to be replaced,' Toba ranted unflinchingly.

‘Quark!’ Rago rasped. ‘Place Probationer Toba under restraint.’

The Quark guarding the Doctor and Zoe advanced on Toba, its probes whirring ominously.

‘Quark!’ Toba countered, his malevolent eyes fixed on Rago. ‘Secure the prisoners.’

The robot lurched to a halt. Its antennae glowed and its probes stabbed the air as its legs jerked it round to face the Doctor and Zoe, and then back round to face Toba again.

The two captives watched from the shadows, fascinated by the robot’s paralysing confusion.

‘Quark, I am the Senior Dominator. You obey me,’ Rago thundered.

The Quark emitted an agonised bleating and then tramped resolutely towards Toba. The Probationer licked his mean lips and backed away a few paces.

‘Will you submit or shall I order molecular adhesion?’

Rago demanded coldly.

Toba lowered his huge head and his body slumped in defeat. ‘I submit...’ he whispered hoarsely.

Rago watched as the Quark continued to advance on Toba with inexorable purpose. Then, when the humiliated probationer looked up in naked terror and let out a macabre whimper, Rago smiled and casually instructed the robot to return to the prisoners. ‘You are fortunate that Fleet still requires your services, Toba,’ he sneered. ‘You will now return to supervise final drilling operations. And allow nothing to distract you.’

Again Toba bowed his head. ‘Command accepted,’ he whispered and marched out.

Rago strode across to the Doctor and Zoe. ‘I require information about your planet,’ he rapped, looming over them.

‘What plan...’ Zoe began.

The Doctor silenced her with a sharp nudge and a pantomime cough. Then he gazed innocently up at Rago, nodding and smilingly meekly.

‘Your responses had better be satisfactory; Rago hissed,

‘for your own sakes.’

7

Buried Alive

Balan, Kandu and Teel were appalled to see the devastation from the Quark attack on the museum.

Wreckage was strewn all over the drilling site which they had sweated so hard to clear earlier. The Quarks forced them back to work with brutal shoves and harsh metallic threats. After only a few minutes, Balan began to gasp and tremble with the strain while Teel and Kando struggled bravely among the smouldering debris.

‘Kully must be dead. No one could have survived in there...’ Kando murmured.

‘The attempt was sheer madness; Balan whispered faintly. ‘It is useless to resist.’

Teel blinked the stinging seat our of his eyes and stared hard at a tangle of beams heaped in the centre of the ruin.

For a fleeting moment he thought he saw something moving. He tried to attract Kando’s attention, but a Quark whirred warningly behind him and he reluctantly resumed his back-breaking task.

Only thirty metres away, the tip of a slim metal shaft was twisting and turning under the beams trying to force its way upwards, but the heavy girders held it fast. Time after time the shaft was withdrawn a few centimetres and then thrust sharply upwards again only to become fouled in the tangled wreckage.

Teel strained to see out of the corner of his eye but eventually gave up, blaming the heat and his exhaustion for deceiving his senses.

At the other end of the vertical shaft, several metres beneath the specially reinforced floor of the ruin, Jamie and Kully were struggling in the stuffy and dusty gloom to force the periscope up into the open. But try as they would, the shaft only moved to far and then jammed solid.

The atomic shelter was a featureless, boxlike room containing four

bunks, an air-filtering unit and two dimly glowing fluorescent lighting strips. A steel ladder led up one wall to a square hatchway in the ceiling. The hatch was tightly shut.

Finally, worn out with their frantic efforts, Jamie and Kully collapsed onto the bunks.

'It's no good. The whole building most be piled on top of it,' Jamie panted.

'We'll just have to wait until someone digs us out,'

Kully shrugged.

Jamie snorted and attempted to take a few deep breaths in the close, stale atmosphere. 'Meantime we'd better stop breathing,' he muttered sarcastically.

Kully glanced at the ventilator unit. 'The batteries are too low to run that thing,' he said hopelessly. 'They won't power the lights much longer either.'

Wearily Jamie hauled himself to his feet. 'Look, Kully, we've got to get that trap door open again' he insisted. He dragged himself up the ladder and started heaving against the unyielding steel hatch with his shoulder.

Kully glanced with grudging admiration at the brawny Highlander's bulging calves as he strained upwards. 'Even if you get it open you'll probably find the Quarks waiting for you,' he objected gloomily.

'That's a risk we'll have to take,' snapped Jamie, resting for a few seconds and swallowing great gulps of stale air.

Kully frowned. 'Don't you see, Jamie? It's suicide either was. The harder we work the sooner we use up the air.'

'Sitting there moaning's no better,' Jamie retorted angrily, puzzled that all the fight seemed to have gone out of Kully suddenly.

'The Dulcians believe it is undignified to struggle against one's fate,' Kully said staring vacantly into space, as if talking to himself.

Jamie twisted round and glared contemptuously down at the forlorn little figure. 'Och come on, Kully... I thought ye were different. Ye sound like those auld fossils in the Council. I thought ye'd fight!' he

taunted, putting his shoulder to the immovable hatch again.

‘I always wanted adventure...’ Kully agreed, sniffing glumly. Then his plumpish face brightened a little. ‘I enjoyed exploding that Quark. That was tremendous fun!’

he cried, more cheerfully.

Shaking the sweat out of his eyes, Jamie rested again. ‘If we can get out of here, maybe we can explode some more,’

he suggested temptingly, ‘so get your fat carcass up here and push, will ye?’

Reluctantly Kully clambered up and squeezed himself breathlessly next to Jamie. Nose to nose they each clung to the rungs with one hand and shoved against the steel hatch with their opposite shoulder.

‘Now... heave!’ Jamie commanded.

Time and again they heaved, pausing briefly to gulp a few breaths of sour, dusty air. The blood hammered in their ears like gunfire and their tight, aching chests were crushed in an invisible vice.

But the hatch did not budge a millimetre...

Outside, so near and yet so far away, Balan, Kando and Teel were on the brink of total collapse. For the second time they had almost cleared the area immediately surrounding the drilling target. Two Quarks were now positioned face to face over the star-shaped marking and Dominator Toba had arrived with the drilling rig itself.

With a sadistic smile, Toba ordered Balan to carry the heavy awkward device over to the target The rig consisted of a bulky cylindrical head, with fluted vanes running vertically around the side and a tapering barrel projecting downwards. A tripod support, slightly longer than the barrel, splayed out from the lower rim of the cylinder.

Balan tottered over the undulating sand and dumped the rig between the waiting Quarks’ extended probes.

Choking with the effort, he managed to lever it upright.

‘Centre it!’ Toba rasped, cuffing him viciously.

Staggering feebly in the shifting sand, Balan threw all his weight against the drill and eventually managed to manoeuvre the mouth of

the barrel exactly over the centre of the star. Then he stumbled back, out of the way.

Toba ordered the Quarks to engage power. With eager whinnyings, they inserted their probes into sockets in the cylindrical head of the rig, while their antennae glowed blood-red.

Teel and Kando had cautiously approached and now supported Balan's sagging body between them, while staring in apprehensive fascination at the drilling operation.

'Angular bore parameters locked,' Toba rapped out.

'Affirmative,' chorused the Quarks.

'Initial depth parameter locked.'

'Affirmative.'

'First stage: commence.'

At first nothing happened. Then the ground shook as a low whining noise rose from the rig, steadily increasing to a higher and higher pitch. All at once an intense beam of light shot from the tip of the barrel a few centimetres above the target. After a few seconds, a clean black hole about ten centimetres across appeared in the centre of the star as the sand parted, melted and then fused around the energy beam.

The three Dulcians reeled backwards, averting their faces from the searing glare and covering their ears against the unbearably rapid throbbing of the machine. However, Toba seemed totally unaffected – his green, red-rimmed eyes resembled two miniature lasers as they reflected the massively concentrated power of the drill.

After a while the incandescent beam vanished, the sickening noise subsided, and the red glow faded from the Quarks' antennae. Toba peered into the crackling borehole and nodded approvingly, almost savouring the oily smoke which curled up into his fare.

Shivering in his pupils' arms, Balan opened his eyes wide with terror and contusion. 'What do they want here?'

he gasped faintly. 'What are they doing to our planet?'

Toba stepped back. 'Second stage,' he rapped.

‘Commence.’

Under Rago’s intensive interrogation, the Doctor had been trying to discover more about the Dominators’ intentions while giving away as little as he could, but his persistent hesitations had finally exasperated the looming Navigator.

‘Senex, your leader.. he is in the Capitol?’ Rago repeated, at the end of his patience.

The Doctor scratched his head, coughed, shrugged, blew his nose and then frowned. ‘Well, that’s difficult to say... I’m not absolutely sure,’ he blustered.

Rago swung round on Zoe. ‘Quark. Molecular adhesion!’ he snapped.

Chattering eagerly, the robot swung out its probes and sent the terrified girl reeling against the wall where she hung limp and staring, like a severed puppet.

Rago turned back to the inanely grinning Time Lord. ‘I asked you a question,’ he hissed.

‘Indeed you did,’ the Doctor nodded, smiling despite Zoe’s anguished moans behind him. ‘Yes, Senex is most likely at the Capitol,’ he conceded at last.

‘How can I travel there?’

The Doctor looked sad. ‘I’m afraid you can’t, the capsule terminal at the survey module was destroyed. By Dominator Toba, I believe.’

Rage’s face darkened with fury. Then he turned and ordered the Quark to prepare the saucer for flight.

The Doctor glimpsed Zoe’s frightened, pleading face.

‘Well, I do happen to know of a capsule not far from here,’

he mumbled.

Rago fixed him with a searching glare.

The Doctor babbled on nervously. ‘I didn’t mention it before because I’m not sure it still works, but I’m sure you could get it going,’ he smiled flatteringly.

‘How large is this machine? Will it transport a Quark?’

The Doctor thought quickly. ‘Oh dear no, I don’t think so,’ he muttered apologetically.

Rago waved his creaking gloves impatiently. ‘We shall take our own craft,’ he announced, striding across to the central dais.

Coughing and sniffing, the Doctor scurried diffidently after him. ‘Actually, if you remove the seats I think a Quark will just fit in,’ he suggested.

The Doctor flinched as the Dominator abruptly rounded on him. Watching anxiously, Zoe feared that her friend had finally gone too far. To her relief, Raga nodded.

‘You will show me the capsule immediately,’ he ordered.

Then he strode away to give instructions to the Quark, cancelling flight preparations.

The Doctor shuffled across to Zoe. ‘Don’t worry, my dear, you’ll be right as rain once the effects wear off,’ he murmured encouragingly.

‘Why did you... tell that monster... about the capsule?’

Zoe asked, fighting bravely against the paralysing effect of molecular adhesion.

‘So we might have a chance to investigate the saucer’s propulsion system,’ the Doctor murmured, ‘then we could discover what these Dominators are looking for here on Dulkis.’

Zoe did not look entirely convinced.

‘Besides,’ the Doctor added, ‘if they take us off to the Capitol we won’t he able to find out about Jamie...’

Zoe looked even more anguished. ‘If only they managed to find the shelter,’ she whispered to herself.

The Doctor had been trying to eavesdrop on the Quark’s complex coded transmission to the Fleet Leader at the communications unit, but he swiftly adopted his cretinous manner as Rago approached.

‘Instruct Probationer Toba to rendezvous with me,’

Rago concluded. ‘Release the female.’

The Quark trained its probes on Zoe and, with a brief pulse of ultrasonic energy, set her free.

‘And now you will lead us to the capsule,’ Rago commanded.

The Doctor bowed. ‘Kindly come this way...’

Rago stared suspiciously at the capsule, lying slightly on its side in deep sand under the cliff, a jumble of wires bristling out of the nose-cone. Then he glared at the Doctor, who tapped the battered hull and signalled the thumbs-up sign, while nodding and grunting encouragingly. Zoe lingered nearby, still stiff and dazed after her ordeal in the saucer, and watched the Doctor’s pantomime with uneasy scepticism.

‘A primitive machine, but functional,’ the Dominator declared at last. ‘Repairs can be effected quite easily.’

‘Oh, certainly,’ the Doctor agreed eagerly.

‘It is well that you appreciate the futility of deception,’

Rago added, completing his inspection.

The Doctor nodded vigorously, like some silent-movie comic and Zoe had to suppress a sudden urge to giggle.

At that moment, Toba arrived.

‘I intend to travel to meet the alien leader,’ Rago informed his subordinate. ‘You will remain and complete drilling operations.’

‘Command accepted,’ Toha readily acknowledged. He stared at the capsule in amazement. ‘You intend to use this crude device?’

‘Affirmative.’

Toba’s malevolent eyes narrowed craftily. ‘Is that wise?

It could prove hazardous,’ he rasped.

‘I shall take a Quark as escort,’ Rego retorted. ‘You, Toba, will command in my absence.’

A spasm of excitement jerked through the Probationer’s giant frame.

‘Command accepted!’ he rapped.

‘However,’ Rago continued with deliberate emphasis, ‘I do not expect to find further destruction on my return.’

While the two Dominators and the Quark were busy preparing the capsule for flight, Zoe and the Doctor managed to confer quietly.

‘...but why didn’t you tell me about the shelter before?’

the Doctor grumbled resentfully. ‘I’ve been worried to death about Jamie.’

‘I’ve hardly had much of a chance,’ Zoe replied hotly.

The Doctor pondered silently, keeping a close watch on the group huddled round the capsule. ‘I suppose it’s just possible they found the shelter,’ he sighed eventually. ‘But if they didn’t...’

Zoe clutched at his sleeve. ‘Couldn’t we just creep away now back to the ruin... and at least try to find them?’ she pleaded, her eyes prickling with tears.

Gently the Doctor put his arm round her shoulder, but before he could reply Toba came striding over to them.

‘You will follow me!’ he commanded.

Zoe opened her mouth to resist, but the Doctor firmly propelled her forward, following Toba back in the direction of the saucer.

As they departed, the Doctor glanced back at the capsule where Rago and the Quark were busy making final adjustments. ‘Happy landings,’ he murmured.

In the atomic shelter, the plight of Jamie and Kully was now desperate. They clung to the ladder under the trap door, gasping for breath, their skins burning and their throats dry as ashes. In vain they listened, straining to detect the faintest hint of rescue. Some time earlier, the vibration of the drilling rig had provided a short-lived burst of euphoria and hope. But since it had stopped there had been total silence: nothing.

‘It’s no good, it’s the end,’ Kully whimpered. ‘They’ve abandoned us. We’ll never get out now.’

Jamie sagged against the cold steel rungs of the ladder, sweat pouring

down his face and dripping off his chin.

‘Doctor, where are ye?’ he gasped, ‘Where are ye?’

Then slowly Jamie roused himself. With an almost superhuman effort he balanced his body and placed both hands against the hatch. Then he straightened his legs and pushed his head up against his hands. Kully stared at him as if he were mad. Jamie’s face went beetroot, he let our a blood-curdling yell and roared: ‘ *MacCrimmons for ever...* ’

Kully stared speechless at the extraordinary totem-like figure with in squashed crimson face performing an almost magical rite in front of him.

Suddenly there was a faint grating sound, a trickle of dust and then a brief waft of cool air. Jamie bent his knees, lowered his arms and seized Kully in a wild embrace.

‘It... it moved... it moved...’ screamed Jamie.

Kully looked doubtfully up at the heavy trap door: ‘You must have imagined it...’

‘Come on, man, heave!’ Jamie shrieked, almost knocking himself out as he thrust frenziedly upwards again with head and hands.

Sceptically Kully did the same The hatch stirred and rose a few millimetres and cool, fresh air rushed through the gap. ‘We did it, we did it!’ Kully yelled, drinking the air greedily. ‘What did I tell you, Jamie?’

After a few seconds they were obliged to lower the trap and rest.

‘Aren’t you the wee ray of sunshine,’ Jamie panted ironically. ‘But we’re no free yet.’

‘Oh don’t be such a defeatist,’ Kully scolded him, ‘it’s no good giving up now.’

‘Who’s giving up?’ Jamie demanded, throwing himself at the hatch again.

‘Well, *I’m*, not,’ Kully cried, adding his considerable weight.

Gratefully they gulped great lungfuls of air as the trap rose several centimetres.

‘Even if we canna get oot, at least the air can get in,’

Jamie observed while they rested once again.

‘No good wasting time,’ Kully panted, heaving away with all his might yet again.

Shaking his head in wry astonishment at Kully’s miraculous new lease of life, Jamie straightened his legs and pushed. Suddenly the hatch gave way so abruptly that they all but toppled off the ladder. Jamie just managed to reach through and grab a pie of metal piping to prop the trap partly open. After another brief rest they moved a rung or two further up the ladder. Then, with a final heave they opened the hatch completely.

Jamie scrambled through and sat thankfully on the ledge, his head and shoulders partially hidden among the debris. ‘Well, come on up. No use hiding down there,’ he urged.

Cautiously Kully hauled himself up through the square opening. They had only a brief opportunity to luxuriate in the fresh air before a feared and familiar noise made Kully start so violently that he almost tumbled back into the shelter.

‘Quarks,’ Jamie exclaimed, peeing intently through the wreckage. He could just make out Teel and Kando working at the drilling site surrounded by several robots.

‘These Dominators aren’t much good without their Quarks, are they?’ he mused.

Kully squinted uneasily through the debris. ‘So?’

‘So, we destroyed one. Why not others?’

Kully looked incredulous. ‘Attack the Quarks?’ he whispered. ‘But we had the laser thing before. Now it’s buried somewhere under this lot.’

Jame squeezed his fleshy arm encouragingly. ‘Och, we MacCrimmons never had such things – but we did for the Redcoats right enough,’ he muttered dramatically.

The Dulcian scratched his balding head in bewilderment: ‘MacCrimmons? Redcoats?’ he echoed blankly.

‘Never mind, ye wee Sassenach,’ Jamie murmured impatiently. ‘Listen,

we'll rescue Teel and Kando. Are ye with me?' he demanded, wrenching free the length of pipe with which he had propped open the hatch, and brandishing it confidently.

Steeling himself, Kully swallowed nervously and then nodded.

With the light of battle in his eyes, Jamie led the way.

They wriggled cautiously through the maze of debris and into a gully behind the ruin which led up the cliffs and was not visible from the drilling site. After a strenuous climb, they were soon edging their way along the meandering clifftop, spying on the scattered groups of Quarks at work among the dunes stretching below them. Eventually they came upon one of the perimeter targets, where Balan and two Quarks were operating a rig.

They threw themselves down in the sand and shielded their eyes as the drill reached maximum power and the whole area lit up like a magnesium flare.

'They seem to be drilling in five places a kind of pattern,' Jamie shouted into Kully's ear above the whining throb of the rig.

'But what for?'

'I dinna ken,' Jamie shouted, 'but I ken what we're going to do right enough.' Using his piece of pipe as a lever, Jamie quickly dislodged a small but heavy boulder from the brittle sandstone. Then grasping it in both hands, he leaped to his feet and hurled it with every ounce of his strength over the cliff edge.

Narrowly missing Balan, the missile struck one of the Quarks squarely on its vertical antenna. Instantly, both Quarks disconnected themselves from the rig and swung round, scanning the dunes in a frenzy of bleating. Balan flung himself headlong in a panic, and lay still.

Chuckling with delight, Kully dug furiously with his finger, and prised up another rock. 'Do it again.. do it again...' he begged, passing it to the crouching Jamie.

Jumping up, Jamie repeated the attack. 'Take that ye wee porridge pot!' he yelled as the second stone crashed onto the domed head of the same Quark.

The other Quark jerked round and fired its probes. A fountain of

molten sand flew up into Jamie's face as he threw himself flat. Suddenly the cliff started to disintegrate around them as the two Quarks fired simultaneously, carving deep gouges out of the soft ridge.

'Time to go!' cried Jamie, scrambling up. But at that same moment there was a mighty roar and the whole cliff collapsed, hurling him helplessly down onto the dunes and leaving Kully scrabbling desperately halfway up the crumbling face in an avalanche of sand.

Picking himself up, Jamie raced towards a steep V-shaped gorge dividing the cliff at right angles nearby.

Sizzling spouts of sand soared all around him as he fled up the sloping cleft with both Quarks tramping rapidly in pursuit.

Meanwhile Kully had managed to scramble back to the clifftop, tripping. as he went, over the length of pipe.

Seizing it, he stooped low and scampered towards some large spherical boulders precariously perched on the edge of the gorge. Reaching them, he saw Jamie below him, running for his life as the gorge exploded around him.

Kneeling behind the biggest stone, Kully inserted the pipe at an angle and heaved. To his delight, the boulder stirred and settled back again. Tingling with excitement, Kully waited until the two Quarks were almost exactly beneath him and then threw all his weight against the pipe.

Gradually the huge stone moved forward. Then it tipped over the lip of the gorge and rolled faster and faster, bouncing down the steep slope in gigantic arching leaps.

Recklessly Kully stood silhouetted against the sky yelling in triumph as the boulder flattened one Quark completely and knocked the other on its side in a cascade of sparks.

'Mac... Crimming's for ever. Death to the Redcoats!'

Kully's victorious cry changed abruptly into a squawk of terror as the edge of the gorge gave was under him and he plunged over and over in a flailing of arms and legs, finally coming to rest next to the astounded Jamie in a hollow.

'Well...' he spluttered, spitting sand out of his mouth and blinking his watering eyes. 'Well, I'm with you now all right!'

A little way down the gorge, the damaged Quark was already whirring back into action. Levering itself upright again, it swung its glowing antennae wildly about like a bundle of fluorescent blades, seeking out its prey trapped in the dead-end of the valley.

8

Clues

The Council had been in session for hours. Director Sencx reclined in his chair, silent and pensive, only half listening to the interminable drone of the Councillors' deliberations.

The violent memory of the Quark attack in the survey module was burnt indelibly in their minds and they had still not recovered from the shock and disappointment of Chairman Tensa's advice.

There was a long silence. Suddenly the Director's face betrayed the deep and impotent anger surging through his being. 'It is our tragedy to do nothing. We are the prisoners of our own negative philosophy,' he declared. 'Little wonder that some of our youth – like my own son – are determined to rebel.'

'But why should the aliens intend as harm us?' asked Deputy Bovem for the thousandth time. 'No intelligent race would indulge in irrational purposeless violence...'

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth than the wall of the chamber parted to admit the huge lumbering figure of Rago, closely followed by his Quark escort. There was an awed and appalled silence while the Dominator flashed his emerald glare around the assembly.

'Who is in control here?' Rago rasped.

Scnex cleared his throat. 'I am the Director,' he replied calmly.

'If you would care to make an appointment...' Bovem began.

Rago turned on the Deputy, his boots and gloves creaking eerily. 'Listen and obey,' he commanded. 'I require information.'

Chairman Tensa strode forward. 'I must protest. Such discourtesy to the Council is tolerable!' he cried.

Rago stared at him incredulously. 'Protest?' he hissed.

'You defy me? You defy a Dominator?'

Tensa stood his ground. ‘Our Director’s rank demands respect,’ he retorted.

‘Demands... respect?’ Rago echoed, his harsh voice brittle with mockery. ‘Your leader is nothing to me. I respect only superior force.’ He swung back to loom over Senex who had risen with great dignity. ‘I command you to supply...’

‘Sir, you would do better to request rather than command,’ Tensa interrupted, forcing his way between Senex and the massive alien.

‘After all, your visit is not even on the Council Agenda; objected an aged Councillor.

Tensa opened his mouth to continue.

‘Quark!’ Rago rapped, stepping quickly back and pointing at Tensa’s outraged face. ‘Destroy.’

A ghost of a smile, chased by a look of sheer uncomprehending horror, flitted across Tensa’s fine features. Before he could speak, the robot bleated its warning and then discharged a brief, devastating bolt of energy. Tensa’s robe fluttered to the floor around the pulverised remains of his body. The Councillors recoiled and fell back in their chairs in stunned silence.

Rago towered over Sencx. ‘I have no desire to repeat such action,’ he stated tonelessly. ‘Let it demonstrate that we Dominators are to be obeyed without question.’

Senex stared back at the alien, his eyes dulled with shock.

‘You will place at our disposal the strongest of your species,’ Rago instructed him.

After a long pause, Senex recovered his voice. ‘You...

yon seek our assistance?’ he said in a dreamlike monotone.

Rago smiled a bleak, humourless smile. ‘Assistance? I require slaves. Nothing more, nothing less,’ he retorted.

Somehow Senex managed to talk through his numbed lips. ‘Had you come to Dulkis in peace we should have done all in our power to assist you, but we cannot bow to...’

‘What we require, we take,’ Rago thundered dismissively. ‘We control

ten galaxies. Our mission is to colonise certain others. For this task our Quarks are needed, therefore we must replace their functions on our home planets.'

'With slaves,' Senex added flatly.

'Exactly. Those selected from your population will be fortunate. They will be saved.'

'Saved?' croaked Bovem. 'Saved from what?'

'Only the strongest are suitable,' Rago hissed, striding wards the wall and rounding on the cowering assembly.

'You will co-operate or perish. The choice is yours.' The wall opened and the alien and his robot disappeared. After a long time some of the Councillors ventured forward and knelt by the broken body in their midst.

'Can we not punish them?' the aged Councillor cried in a choking voice, wringing his gnarled hands incessantly.

Bovem glanced round at each member in turn. 'What did the alien mean... some of us would be saved?' he breathed. 'Saved from what?'

Sinking back into his chair, Senex shook his head and sighed. 'Perhaps from ourselves,' he murmured hopelessly.

'Perhaps from ourselves...'

When the Doctor and Zoe arrived back at the saucer with Toba, the control centre was humming with activity.

Quarks marched about, plugging themselves into computer terminals and systems displays as they performed the complex sequences of the drilling operation. Tuba began to stride up and down, bloated with self-importance and revelling in his temporary role of commander.

'Report progress to Fleet Leader,' he instructed a Quark.

'All perimeter bores completed. Central bore approaching optima...'

The Doctor stood in the shadows with Zoe, his hands plunged deep in his pockets, long furrows stretching each side of his nose. 'We must find out what they're drilling for,' he exclaimed.

'Fat chance with all these Quarks everywhere,' Zoe grimaced.

‘Hmm. If only we could distract them somehow,’ mused the Doctor, peering vainly about for inspiration.

At that moment, two symbols started flashing on the Quark control unit. Toba rushed over and thumped the panel with his giant fist. One of the symbols stopped flashing and remained

‘Another Quark has been destroyed and a third has been damaged,’ Toba raged.

‘This could be just what we need,’ the Doctor muttered, pulling Zoe further into the shadows. They watched the frenetic alien intently.

‘Quarks follow!’ screamed Toba.

Immediately the robots disconnected themselves and followed Toba out of the control centre in a sparking, chattering line. Soon Zoe and the Doctor were left quite alone.

‘Who would destroy a Quark?’ Zoe wondered.

The Doctor grinned broadly. ‘I think I can guess!’ he cried, rubbing his hands together gleefully.

‘Jamie!’ Zoe exclaimed after a momentary pause. ‘So they did escape after all.’

‘Alive and kicking by the sound of things,’ the Doctor agreed. ‘Good lads! We must make the most of our opportunity.’ He scurried off round the huge circular chamber, peering closely at print-outs, displays, inspection panels and crystal switches, and muttering furiously to himself the whole time.

Zoe did her best to keep up with him. ‘What exactly are we looking for?’ she asked breathlessly.

‘I want to find out what they feed this thing on,’ replied the Doctor, darting into an elaborate assembly of flickering tubes.

Zoe trailed after him. ‘Well, the Quarks seem to use ultrasonics, so presumably it’s a fuel capable of producing random amplified fields and accelerated phases,’ she suggested.

‘Hmm, it must be quite powerful too,’ added the Doctor, poking thoughtfully among the coloured fluorescent columns.

‘Well, that’s what I just said.. ‘ Zoe stopped and blushed, realising too

late that she had been sent up. ‘Look, if you don’t want my help, Doctor...’

‘Oh but I do, Zoe,’ the Doctor assured her, backing carefully out of the mass of tubes and standing upright again. ‘Now, my dear, where do you think the essential power source is lurking?’

Zoe walked around fora few seconds frowning with concentration. ‘Well, if they use ultrasonics...’

‘No, no, no...’cried the Doctor, ‘more likely to be some form of particle acccicmtion.’ He dropped to his knees and started to crawl round and round the central control dais, his nose to the deck like a bloodhound. Eventually he stopped, sniffed, crawled backwards a few metres, stopped, sniffed, crawled forwards a metre and finally stopped.

Then he tapped a small panel in the side of the dais.

‘Here we are!’ he cried. ‘Just as I expected.’ He tapped again and than listened. ‘Or is it?’ he demanded, kneeling up and staring enquiringly at Zoe.

She shrugged impatiently.

‘Well, there’s only one way to find out.’ Taking a small penknife from his pocket, the Doctor began prising at the edge of the access panel, still muttering away. Suddenly the panel sprang free. Carefully the Doctor removed it and peered inside. He cocked his head and listened. Then he sniffed a few times and to Zoe’s astonishment, licked his finger and poked it into the opening for several seconds.

‘Oh dear...’ he sighed. ‘Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear...’ He clicked his tongue and shook his head.

‘Whatever’s the matter Doctor?’

Instead of answering, the Doctor pulled out a compact, tubular instrument, shook it, blew on it and then tied it to a long piece of string. Cautiously he lowered the gadget into the opening, paying out the string as it went.

Suddenly a series of sharp clicks emerged from the gadget. The Doctor frowned and nodded energetically. ‘I thought so...’ he murmured, paying out more string. The clicking increased dramatically as the Geiger counter registered radiation.

‘Atomic reactor?’ Zoe asked, craning over the Doctor’s shoulder.

The Doctor stared down at the clusters of spherical vessels filling the entire area under the dais. ‘No, my dear, nothing as crude as that,’ he replied at last. He hauled the Geiger counter out of the trap and thoughtfully wrapped the string tightly round it. ‘No. This is almost certainly a form of negative mass flux absorption system.’

Zoe’s eyebrows shot up. ‘A what?’

‘A sort of radiation vacuum cleaner,’ the Doctor explained. ‘It would account for the sudden disappearance of radio-activity from the Island.’

You mean this thing sucked it all up?’

‘In a manner of speaking, Zoe, yes.’

Zoe pondered a moment. ‘Then what on earth are they drilling all those holes out there for?’

The Doctor tapped his nose with the cocoon of string. ‘I wish I knew, my dear... I wish I knew...’ he mumbled vacantly.

When Toba and his cohort of Quarks reached the fourth perimeter target near the gorge, Baran was still lying dazed by the rig. Toa yanked him to his feet.

‘A Quark has been destroyed, another damaged. Who was responsible?’ he hissed.

The frail Dulcian whimpered helplessly. Toba shook his victim like a bundle of sticks. Baran stared like a terrified animal. ‘I did not see... I was working... I was almost hit...’

he pleaded.

The Quarks had formed a circle round the rig and were scanning the area with wickedly slicing antennae.

‘Evidence of alien assault,’ one of them squawked.

Toba gripped Balan’s stick-like arms mercilessly. ‘Is there a resistant force on this Island?’ he demanded hopefully.

‘There is no force on Dulkis,’ Baran answered feebly.

The Dominator flung the old man aside and gazed around, his green, red-rimmed eyes alight with malice. ‘Quarks, search the Island. Destroy any alien specimens not accounted for. Total destruction!’ he raved, his huge nostrils flaring hideously. Having ordered a Quark to escort Baran back to the saucer, he marched away to the central bore target by the ruined museum.

There, Kando and Teel still laboured to clear the remaining debris under the relentless surveillance of a pair of Quarks.

‘Perimeter four has been attacked and a Quark eliminated,’ Toba spat, stamping up to them.

Kando turned excitedly to Teel. ‘Kully must have...’

Too late her she bit her lip and blushed.

Toba seized her by the hair and twisted viciously. The willowy girl folded like a wounded gull. ‘What do you know about this?’ Tuba screamed.

‘Leave her...’ Teel blurted out, wielding a metal strip.

Dropping Kando, Toba turned on the youth. ‘Do you dare to defy a Dominator?’ he challenged in an awesome whisper.

Suddenly Teel hurled himself forward, flailing uselessly at the enormous armoured figure standing over the pale, quaking girl.

Toba did not move, but merely gloated with creaking grunts of pleasure as Teel battered vainly against his plated chest. Eventually, the Dominator tired of the game as his assailant’s slim arms quickly weakened.

‘Quark. Restrain!’ he commanded.

One of the robots advanced on Teel, opening its probes like a pincer.

‘No!’ Kando gasped, scrambling up.

Toba seized her wrists and shook her like a dish cloth.

‘No one ever questions a Dominator,’ he rapped.

The Quark caught Teel round the waist and lifted him effortlessly off the ground. Then it tightened its grip and Teel almost folded in half.

‘Stop. Please stop!’ Kando cried, hanging limp from Toba’s gloves.

‘Power!’ Tuba ordered.

There was a dull cracking sound and Teel uttered a long hollow moan of agony.

‘Stop. I’ll tell you...’ Kando shrieked.

‘Release!’ commanded Toba.

The Quark immediately opened its probes and Teel dropped to the sand, writhing silently.

‘Who attacked my Quarks?’ Toba demanded, thrusting his face into Kando’s as he raised her level with him.

‘It... it must have been Kully.’

‘The specimen Kully is destroyed,’ retorted Toba, twisting Kando’s slender wrists in opposite directions. She struggled to speak, but the excruciating pain paralysed her throat.

Then the Dominator’s emerald eyes shrank into tiny brilliant points. ‘The other boy... the stupid one. He must be responsible.’ he hissed. ‘Where is he?’

Kando shook her head and then closed her eyes, waiting for the end. But her tormentor suddenly released her and she slumped at his feet, huddled and trembling.

Toba loomed or his two victims, as if he were about to crush them out of existence. ‘One of you must know where the stupid one is,’ he breathed at last.’ And you will tell me...’

The Doctor only just had time to replace the inspection panel in the dais when the Quark drove Balan into the control centre. While the robot went over to monitor the bore-project display, the Doctor and Zoe managed a furtive conversation with the exhausted Educator. Zoe was overjoyed to hear that Jamie had probably destroyed another Quark and damaged a third. Despite Balan’s condition, the Doctor plied him with whispered questions in an attempt to solve the mystery of the drilling operations.

‘Balan, when the Dulcian scientists exploded the atomic device on the Island all those years ago... where did they obtain the fission

material?'

Balan cast his clouded mind back as best he could. 'I believe that their requirements came from somewhere in the northern hemisphere...'

'The other side of the planet. Then why are the Dominators drilling here?'

Balan shrugged wearily. 'Perhaps because the planet's crust is very thin just here.'

The Doctor slapped himself on the forehead. 'The magma!' he gasped, turning to Zoe. 'The molten planetary core...' He turned back to Balan. 'Could the magma be radioactive?'

The Educator looked uncertain. 'The minor eruptions which occur here from time to time have never registered such radiation, Doctor.'

'But are we sure these Dominator, are drilling for fuel?'

Zoe interjected.

The Doctor gestured at the schematic display in front of the Quark. 'It's the pattern that intrigues me, Zoe,' he murmured. 'Four drill holes arranged in a square, with a fifth hole where the diagonals cross in the centre...

fascinating...'

Zoe squinted across the chamber at the project display.

'I think that fifth hole is the one by the ruin, Doctor: The Doctor nodded. 'The bull's-eye...' he murmured.

At that moment Probationer Toba burst in followed by the Quark with Kando and Teel. The latter was stumbling, doubled over with both arms clutched across his chest.

'Quarks, assemble the specimens,' ordered Toba.

The two robots herded Kando and Teel next to the Doctor, Zoe and Balan. Zoe tried to help Kando support the injured Teel, but they were brutally shoved apart.

Toba walked slowly round the frightened huddle. 'The other simpleton – the boy – is missing,' he rasped. 'He has defied the Dominators and attacked the Quarks. Where is he?'

There was a long silence. Zoe glanced anxiously at the Doctor. Balan gazed in horror at Kando and the semi-conscious Teel.

Toba walked round them again, his vast hands clenching and unclenching with an ominous squeaking.

'You will die, one by one, until you inform me...' he tormented them.

Still there was silence. Toba stopped and jabbed his creaking glove at Balan. 'You were a witness. Speak.'

The Educator stared mesmerised into Toba's glittering eyes.

The Dominator stepped hack. 'Quark, destroy!'

One of the robots whirred expectantly. Kando cried out and clung convulsively to Teel. A sizzling bolt tore through the air and Balan's protective suit collapsed in a heap, empty.

Striding over it with savage indifference, Toba towered over the Doctor. 'You know the simpleton boy. Where is he? Answer or die.'

The Doctor hesitated, fiddling nervously with his tie and blinking meekly. Then his eyes narrowed and he curled his lip in disgust and contempt. But he remained silent.

Zoe held her breath, watching the Doctor's struggle to contain his outrage with anxious admiration.

'Answer!' hissed Toba.

The Doctor compressed his lips and set his jaw.

Something in his eyes seemed to disconcert the Dominator, something he had not anticipated.

After a brief duel of wills, Toba turned abruptly and lumbered away a few paces. 'Quark!' he rapped.

The nearest Quark jerked its probes round towards the Doctor and waited, its antennae glowing red and its circuits clattering in growing excitement.

Zoe thrust her fist into her mouth and shut her eyes...

Last Chances

Jamie and Kully had managed to escape from the gorge by the skin of their teeth after the damaged Quark, hard on their heels, had suddenly ground to a smoking halt halfway up the slope, its traction mechanism finally burnt out, but its probes still firing intermittently. As they dragged themselves dazed but unharmed onto the plateau above, they found their escape cut off. A huge crescent of Quarks was advancing towards them, driving them relentlessly back into the gorge.

'Where did all yon tin Sassenachs spring from?' Jamie exclaimed, pulling Kully down into a hollow just in time to avoid the vicious crossfire of ultrasonic pulses which suddenly shredded the air above them.

A stinging torrent of sand erupted a few metres away and fell on them, almost completely burying them. Jamie wriggled furiously to and fro, working his way in a kind of trench towards the steep cliff edge.

'Come away, Kully!' Jam yelled above the sizzling din.

'Let's get to the shelter and lie doggo till things cool down.

wee bit.'

'Doggo?' Kully echoed, spitting the sand our of his mouth and trying to imitate Jamie's ample.

With a series of deafening roars, several more huge columns of sand shot into the air and scattered around them. Jamie turned himself round and grabbed Kully's flailing hands, and hauled the squirming Dulcian towards the steep drop.

'Come on, they're far too close for comfort!' Jamie panted, heaving Kully's sweating hulk through the trench.

When the exhausted Dulcian reached the precipitous edge, he went rigid with terror. Without thinking, Jamie rolled himself over the cliff and dragged Kully after him...

Half rolling and half sliding down the brittle sandstone face, they soon reached the dunes below. Then, after a hair-raising skirmish with a Quark patrol advancing from the direction of the saucer, they eventually reached the deserted ruin.

Bundling Kully through the hatch into the atomic shelter, Jamie searched frantically around in the wreckage until he located the tip of the periscope mechanism. After a brief struggle, he managed to clear away the obstruction that was preventing it extending properly. Nearby, he came across the blocked inlet for the ventilator system and soon dislodged enough sand to allow at least some air through into the shelter below. Then he took cover.

Squeezing himself through the hatch, Jamie carefully lowered it shut after making sure that no loose debris could jam it again. He found Kully lying on one of the bunks.

'That was marvellous fun,' Kully panted, 'especially the avalanche.'

'Aye, we fair stirred them up,' Jamie chuckled, getting his breath back. 'We'll lie low a wee while and keep 'em guessing. Then we'll oot and bag another Quark or two.'

Just then his stomach rumbled noisily. 'Och, I'm fair starving,' he grinned.

Kully patted his own ample belly. 'Fighting is hungry work,' he agreed cheerfully. Levering himself off the bunk, he began to rummage in a small locker unit underneath it.

With a whoop of triumph he stood up brandishing a slim bar wrapped in toil. Tearing off the wrapper, he broke the bar in half and handed Jamie a piece of a grey waxy substance.

Jamie sniffed at it unenthusiastically. 'What's this stuff?'

'Basic nutrients,' Kully explained, cramming his portion into his mouth and chewing greedily. 'Proteins, vitamins, carbohydrates. You can survive on it for annos.'

He swallowed and licked his lips.

Jamie bit off a tiny piece and chewed tentatively. 'I hope I'll no need to do that: it tastes like old candles,' he grimaced, tossing the remainder to Kully.

Rousing himself, Jamie went across to the periscope, grasped the handles and pushed upwards. It slid quite freely, despite emitting a nasty scraping sound 'Let's see how the land lies..' he muttered, peering into the binocular viewer. For while he was silent, twisting the tube slowly from side to side, then he turned.

Kully stopped chewing and stared at him.

‘We’ve got visitors...’ Jamie said. ‘Lots of them.’

‘Quark, order cancelled. Toba, what is the meaning of this?’

Zoe cried out in gratitude and relief as Rago’s powerful voice suddenly rang around the control centre.

Hissing with frustration, Toba spun round to face his leader as he emerged from the elevator followed by his escort.

Rago stared down at Balan’s suit, at the cowering figures of Kando and Teel, and finally turned to his sullen subordinate. ‘Explain, Probationer Toba’ he snapped.

The Doctor mopped his glistening face and squeezed Zoe’s cold hand gratefully. ‘That was a trifle near the mark...’ he whispered wryly.

Toba brazened things out as best he could. ‘We were attacked, Navigator Rago. A Quark was destroyed, another damaged. In the emergency I decided to...’

‘Emergency? Rago sneered. ‘A handful of primitives manage to incapacitate a Quark and you interrupt vital projects to waste time and valuable power chasing them all over the Island?’

Toba creaked forward a few paces: ‘I decided to hold an inquiry, Navigator...’

Rago turned impatiently and frowned dangerously at the bore-project display. ‘Is drilling complete?’

‘All four perimeter bores are completed,’ said Toba hurriedly.

‘And the centre target?’

Toba hesitated uncomfortably. ‘A minor delay... caused by strata deviations.’

Rago leaned closer. ‘The only deviations have occurred in your behaviour, Tuba. Quark power reserves approach minimal levels and drilling is incomplete, yet you fritter precious resources in fruitless chases and in killing insignificant aliens.’

Toba was aware of the Doctor’s contemptuous stare boring into his back. ‘I considered it my duty...’ he protested.

‘Your duty is to complete the project according to schedule,’ Rago thundered. ‘Have the rockets been installed at the perimeter targets?’

The Doctor’s face lit up with profound interest and anticipation and he edged surreptitiously closer to gain a better view of the project display across the vast chamber.

‘Not yet,’ Toba admitted after an embarrassed pause.

‘Do it at once,’ Rago ordered. ‘Is the seeding trigger approaching criticality?’

There has not been sufficient time to determine.’

‘Time?’ Rago boomed, the rims of his eyes burning like red-hot rings. ‘Toba, if you have jeopardised this most vital stage of our mission by your obsessive irresponsibility, then you will remain here on Dulkis and perish with the weaker primitives.’

The Doctor observed intently as Toba hurried across to the central dais and opened a heavily armoured circular panel near the one he and Zoe had examined earlier. A soft pink glow spread over Toba’s body as he withdrew a large opaque object resembling an ostrich egg, encased within a kind of glass shell with short blunt spikes protruding in all directions. The Probationer peered at each protrusion in turn, the glow transforming his features into a caricature carnival mask.

‘Report!’ Rago rapped impatiently.

‘The seeding trigger approaches criticality minus gamma.’

Toba carefully replaced the device and closed the thick panel.

Zoe glanced at the Doctor. He was uttering silently to himself and nodding knowingly as he watched Toba’s every move.

‘Minus gamma. Then there is not a moment to lose, Toba,’ Rago warned urgently. ‘The centre bore must be completed and projectiles will he inserted in the perimeter targets immediately. Understood?’

‘Command accepted,’ Toba promptly acknowledged.

Rago strode across to the Quark control unit and passed his enormous hand over a sequence of coloured keys. ‘The search is cancelled. All Quarks to position at drilling stations and conserve power until further instructions.’ he ordered. Then he turned back to his suhordivatc ‘I

shall communicate with Fleet Leader regarding the exploitation potential of the primitives. Meanwhile, keep them under constant supervision.'

Ordering the two Quarks to follow with the four surviving prisoners, Toba strode towards the elevator.

'Toba.'

The Probationer stopped and waited.

'This your final chance. Do not waste it.'

As the captives were prodded into motion by the Quarks, the Doctor glanced sideways at Zoe. 'Speaking of chances,' he muttered, 'from now on we must be sure not to waste any of ours.'

For some time the assembled Quarks had remained motionless and silent outside the ruin, like a plantation of dwarf mechanical trees waiting for some unwary bird to light among them. Jamie peered apprehensively at them through the periscope, while Kully lay on a bunk, nervously devouring the emergency rations out of the locker. The tension was almost tangible, like the closeness in the air before a thunderstorm.

Suddenly Jamie whooped with delight. 'More visitors, Kully!' he exclaimed, as the Doctor, Zoe, Kando and Teel trudged into view.

Kully elbowed him aside. 'Balan isn't with them,' he muttered anxiously, panning the periscope. Then he groaned.

'More Quarks?' Jamie eagerly siezed the viewer again, but he too groaned as he watched Toba arrive and start supervising some of the Quarks around the rig. 'We've got to get them in here with us. We canna just leave them up there...' he said, focusing on the Doctor and Zoe.

'Here we go again,' Kully sighed, clutching head in despair.

The young Highlander grinned mischievously and glanced quickly round the bleak concrete shelter. His eyes lit on the plastic sheeting covering the bunks. He whipped a gleaming dirk out of its sheath inside his sock and rapidly slit the sheeting free from one of the mattresses.

Kully watched in baffled silence as he cut a long narrow strip from

one side.

‘Now listen carefully, Kully,’ Jamie said firmly, ‘this is what we’ll do...’

Guarded by a single Quark and huddled some distance from the drilling apparatus, the Doctor and the others covered their ears and averted their faces as the rig began to whine and throb and an intense beam of light flashed down the barrel into the target hole. As the ground vibrated and the whole area shimmered in the hot searing glare, the Doctor attempted to squint under his thick dark eyebrows to observe the awesome procedure.

Zoe put her mouth close to his ear. ‘Any idea what they’re looking for?’ she shouted.

The Doctor forced his blinking watering eyes to stay at least partially open for a few more seconds. Then he turned to her. ‘Oh, I don’t think they intend to take anything *out* of the hole, Zoe,’ he yelled back. ‘More likely they’re going to drop something *in*.’

‘But what?’

Before the Doctor could reply, he caught a glimpse of someone moving among the debris up by the ruin, behind their Quark sentry. ‘Oh dear me... oh no...’ he muterred, as Jamie emerged crouching low and dropped onto his stomach behind a low ridge of sand.

The attention of Toba and of the Quarks was totally absorbed in the screaming and throbbing drill, as Jamie starred wriggling his way towards the unsuspecting robot.

With his back to the rig, the Doctor was able to watch in anxious fascination as Jamie knelt up behind the Quark, reached into his shirt and unrolled the thin plastic strip, Reaching forward, Jamie carefully wound the strong material round and round the robot’s thick, concertina legs, binding them tightly together.

The reckless lad froze as the Quark’s antennae waggled and flickered and its domed head stirred suspiciously.

Then the robot suddenly shifted slightly and its rectangular foot came down, trapping Jamie’s hand underneath. Thrusting the end of the plastic strip into his mouth, Jamie stifled his agony.

Promptly the Doctor stepped forward. ‘Excuse me, sir!’

he cried.

The sparking robot immediately unfolded its probes and went to advance on the Doctor, but as it tried to take a step it overbalanced and its bulky body pitched forward into the sand.

At that same moment, Kully scampered out from behind the ruin and enveloped the Quark's antennae in the plastic sheet, completely depriving it of its senses.

Blowing frantically on his throbbing hand, Jennie leaped up and, while Kully hurriedly shepherded the astonished prisoners safely into the ruin, he dragged a heavy beam from some nearby wreckage and heaved it on top of the struggling robot.

The disabled Quark started to emit a piercing distress signal which at first was inaudible against the howl of the drilling rig, but eventually Toba heard it.

Ordering operations to cease, Toba scanned the area in a frenzy. 'A Quark has been attacked and the specimens have escaped...' he screamed as the glare and the noise of the apparatus subsided. Striding towards the ruin, Toba hurled the beam aside and ripped the sheet off the stricken Quark, which began rolling about on its back like a mechanical beetle.

'Quark, where are the specimens?' Toba demanded.

'Sensors temporarily inoperable. No data recorded,'

bleated the robot pathetically.

Toba swung round hysterically. 'Quarks, search. Search and destroy...' he shrieked, starting to clamber over the wreckage around the ruined museum, kicking and hurling debris in all directions.

'Command cancelled!' Rago's voice sliced like a blade through the hot muggy air.

Toba lurched to a halt, his huge limbs jerking spasmodically.

'Why has drilling been interrupted yet again?' Rago demanded icily, approaching between the assembled Quarks.

Toba mumbled an explanation.

Rago surveyed the silent rig. 'Probationer, if you cannot perform the

tasks assigned to you here, you will never gain full Dominator status,' he rasped. 'Complete the bore.'

With as much dignity as he could muster, Toba clambered back onto the sand and strode back to the rig.

'The primitives will not escape unpunished,' Rago added with condescending generosity, as Toba ordered the Quarks by the rig to reconnect power. 'Fleet Leader confirms that Dulcians are totally unsuitable for our projects. Therefore they will die with their planet.'

Toba's eyes flashed with malignant satisfaction. 'Then the sooner we complete operations the better.'

'Exactly. I shall now supervise the positioning of the projectiles at the perimeter targets. Inform me when the centre bore is prepared for the seeding trigger.' Rago commanded a detachment of Quarks to accompany him and then strode rapidly away across the dunes.

Jamie had only just had time to squeeze himself through the hatch before the frenzied Toba clambered onto the wreckage above the open trap-door. In the shelter below, the six fugitives had then waited in total silence, scarcely daring even to breathe until the two Dominators moved away. Then at last Jamie had carefully lowered the heavy trap and jumped down to on the others.

'That was extremely rash of you, Jamie,' the Doctor scolded him, smiling appreciatively, 'those Quarks can be appallingly dangerous.'

'Och, they're nae so terrible,' Jamie grinned, giving Zoe an affectionate hug.

Kulls turned from the periscope. 'Where's Balan?' he asked.

Gently, Kando explained what had happened.

'You did all you could, Kully,' Teel murmured, nursing his bruised ribs. 'Thanks to you and Jamie, the rest of us are safe.'

'I'm not so sure about that,' Jamie told him. 'I just heard those Dominators saying that the Dulcians are no use to them.'

Kando smiled innocently. 'Then they will leave us in peace now.'

Jamie glanced at the Doctor and Zoe in embarrassment.

Then he turned to the three Dulcians. 'They said that you would all

die... with your planet,' he mumbled helplessly.

Kully peered back into the periscope. 'They can't destroy Dulkis...' he protested indignantly.

Just then the shelter began to vibrate as Toba's unit resumed drilling outside.

The Doctor coughed and cleared his throat. 'I'm afraid they can. I believe they intend to use your planet as fuel for their fleet.'

There was a long, shocked silence. The Doctor shrugged, smiled bleakly and then examined his fingernails minutely. 'I'm most terribly sorry.'

Then Zoe stuck her chin out. 'But Doctor, you decided that their saucer uses atomic power,' she objected.

'There are no suitable radioactive minerals in this hemisphere,' Kando reminded him.

The Doctor waved his arms impatiently. 'No, no, no, there is no reactor in the saucer, only a radiation accumulator and converter system.'

Everyone looked blank.

'Negative mass flux absorption,' the Doctor cried, glancing triumphantly around him.

'What?' Jamie gasped.

'They suck up the radiation, store it and then convert it into propulsion?' Zoe speculated.

The Doctor beamed at her. 'Precisely, Zoe.' He turned to the Dulcians. 'Remember how all the radioactivity disappeared from the Island as soon as the saucer arrived?'

Kando and Teel nodded and a glimmer of understanding flickered between them.

Jam s speechless for a moment. 'So, why are they doing all that drilling out there?' he suddenly blurted out, in a burst of frustrated desperation.

'Can't imagine why no one's asked me that before!' the Doctor cried,

fumbling in his pockets and unearthing a broken stick of chalk. Then he rushed over to the wall and started drawing feverishly. ‘Four deep holes...’ he said, marking out the corners of a square with little crosses.

‘Another deep hole – the one outside here –’ he announced, putting a small star at the centre of the square.

The Doctor glanced over his shoulder at the semicircle of puzzled faces staring intently at his sketch. ‘Now, a rocket is fired down each of the four corner holes which all meet at a point far below the surface...’ Turning back to the wall, the Doctor quickly drew a side view, showing the four angled shafts intersecting exactly below the fifth one. Once again the Doctor glanced round at his audience. ‘My guess is that they intend to drop that seeding device - the thing we saw the saucer, Zoe – down the fifth hole... Simple really, isn’t it!’

Jame nodded. ‘Aye,’ he mumbled.

‘Well, don’t you see?’ cried the Doctor. ‘They’re going to fire the rockets through the planet’s crust – which is very thin just here on the Island – and into the magma.’

‘But that could cause a volcano,’ Zoe interrupted.

‘Exactly, Zoe.’

‘And if they explode the seed device in the middle of it...’

‘... then the planet will become a vast mass of molten radioactive material,’ the Doctor concluded. ‘If their calculations are correct, a vast fuel source at exactly the right particle density and energy flux.’

Turning back to the wall, the Doctor added the trajectories of the rockets and the seeding trigger and then with violent swirls of chalk drew a colossal explosion. He stared at his handiwork in silence for a moment. When he turned round again, the otters were looking at him as if expecting some word of comfort or advice. He smiled bleakly, shrugged, sighed, and srarecl at his fingernails.

‘Aye, well we’ll just have to stop them, won’t we?’ Jamie said at last.

The Doctor agreed. There was another long silence, broken only by the sickening vibration caused by the throbbing rig outside. Zoe began to imagine she could almost feel the planet shuddering in horror at its approaching fate.

The Doctor realised that everyone was waiting for him.

‘Yes, well, that’s easier said than done, Jamie...’ he flustered. ‘Perhaps if we could somehow get hold of that seeding trigger.. ‘ He sat on a bunk and stared at his diagrams, hunched with concentration.

Suddenly Jane jumped up. ‘Hey, Doctor...’

‘Please, Jame, I am trying to think.’

‘Aye, but I think I know how...’

‘Jamie!’ Zoe snapped irritably.

The impetuous young Sent grabbed Kully’s arm.

‘Listen, I know how can get hold of this atomic seed thing.’

‘Oh really, Jamie?’ exclaimed Zoe with a sarcastic smile.

Jamie rounded on her. ‘The Doctor said they were going to drop it down that hole outside...’

‘Indeed I did,’ agreed the Doctor absently.

‘Aye, well, it’s simple. We dig a tunnel from here out to their shaft and catch the wee thing on its way down!’

Zoe turned eagerly to the Doctor. He remained staring silently into space, and still, like a Buddha.

‘Och well, it was just a thought...’ Jamie trailed glumly into silence.

All at once the Doctor sprang to his feet. ‘Just a thought.

And so simple, Jamie, only you could have thought it!’ He seized Jamie’s hand and pumped it enthusiastically up and down.

Jamie grinned sheepishly, as if uncertain whether to regard this as a compliment.

‘We could use the periscope,’ Zoe suggested. ‘Just line it up on the drill and that’s the direction...’

The Doctor held up his hand. ‘There’s one little snag.

Our tunnel will have to be quite a few metres long and we haven’t

much time.'

'But the sandstone should be reasonably soft,' Zoe pointed out.

'And Kully and I can slow those Dominators down a wee bit,' Jamie laughed, flinging his arm round the Dulcian's shoulders.

Kully nodded eagerly. 'We are experts at sabotaging Quarks,' he reminded them.

The Doctor looked serious. 'You've both been very lucky so far,' he warned them. 'Now if we could only devise some kind of weapon for you...'

'Weapon?' Kully echoed, glancing at Kando and Teel.

They smiled and nodded encouragement. 'There's nothing down here except out-of-date rations and medical kits.'

'Medical kits!' cried the Doctor. 'The very thing. It's surprising what one can achieve with a few simple chemicals. See what you can find, Kully.'

While Kully searched through the lockers beneath the bunks, the Doctor led Zoe and Jamie over to the periscope.

'We must establish the direction for our tunnel very accurately,' he advised, as Zoe raised the tube and peered into the smoked-glass binocular, sighting it as best she could on the incandescent glare of the flashing rig.

'That's the bearing...' she said at last, blinking and massaging her watering eyes.

'Righto, Zoe.' The Doctor squinted at right angles to the alignment of the periscope's handles and then marked a point n the wall of the shelter with his chalk. 'We'll have to move this bunk first though.'

As soon as they had cleared the space, the Doctor carefully drew a large circle around his chalk mark. Jamie could hardly wait to start chipping away at the concrete with his dirk, but for all his enthusiasm, the sharp blade screeched and skidded uselessly across the hard surface.

'I think perhaps I had better start you off...' the Doctor chuckled, groping in his pockets and finally producing a strange object like a

slim torch with a bulbous end and with various itches along its casing.

Jamie snorted scornfully: 'Och, how are ye going to dig a tunnel wi'a screwdriver?' he demanded.

The Doctor looked indignant. 'This not merely a sonic screwdriver, Jamie...' he retorted, adjusting several switches and then pointing the device at the wall at arm's length. 'Now... watch...'

Everyone looked on astonishment as the Doctor's gadget emitted a powerful warbling sound. All at once, in the centre of the chalk circle, the solid concrete seemed to soften and then melt and finally to evaporate before their eyes.

In no time at all the Doctor bored a large hole right through the shelter wall to the sandstone beyond. Then he left the others to take over the tunnelling and turned his attention to the contents of the medical kits which Kully had unearthed in the lockers.

While Jamie, Kully, Kando and even Teel worked like beavers digging into the softish ground, Zoe helped the Doctor to measure and mix various combinations of chemicals in a number of small phials. Some of the mixtures frothed violently, changed colour threateningly and gave off clouds of evil-smelling vapour. But the Doctor seemed oblivious of any hazards, hunched over his task and muttering to himself like some mediaeval alchemist in his den.

Eventually Jamie grew impatient. 'Doctor, I don't think we can wait any longer...' he said, crawing backwards out of the growing hole and brushing the sand our of his hair.

'Hang on, Jamie,' the Doctor muttered, carefully pouring a little of each mixture into a test-tube. He shook the foul liquid until it suddenly went colourless. like water.

'If this works, you'll not only be able to distract the Quarks, you'll most likely blow them to smithereens. Let's try it out shall we?'

'In here?' Zoe exclaimed in alarm_

The Doctor grinned reassuringly. 'Just a tiny quantity.'

He took a little silver pill from a bottle and held it poised over the mouth of the test-tube. 'Now, Jamie, just add one of these pills to the mixture before you throw it. Like this...'

The Doctor popped the pill into the tube and stuck a small cork in the end. ‘Don’t forget Jamie, you must throw it before ten seconds have elapsed, otherwise...’

‘Six... seven... eight... Doctor!’ Zoe shrieked.

With a start the Doctor flung the phial over his shoulder. There was a blue flash and a brief roar as it exploded under of the bunks behind them. The Doctor grinned as everybody jumped in fright.

‘It works!’ he cried, hugging Zoe ecstatically.

‘Och, ye could have blown us all tae bits,’ Jamie gasped, pale as milk.

The Doctor shook his head. ‘That was nothing. With ten times as much in each tube you’ll have quite an effective armoury...’

All of a sudden there was total silence. Everybody listened. Then they all turned to the Doctor. He was looking suddenly haggard. The drilling had stopped.

It seemed that their last chance was to be denied them after all.

10

Desperate Remedies

Jamie and Kully were soon edging their way out of the back of the ruin and scrambling up the cliff between two bluffs which afforded some cover from the drilling site.

Their mission to create a diversion had now become one of interception. They must prevent the seeding trigger from reaching the centre bore target.

Armed with the phials of colourless liquid and the box of tiny pills, they followed the meandering cliff-edge in the direction of the saucer until they reached one of the perimeter sites guarded by two silent and motionless Quarks below them. They crouched at the edge. Jamie held out a phial and nodded. Kully dropped in a silver pill and began counting while Jamie jammed in the cork. Then Jamie hurled the bomb as far as he could and they both flattened themselves and waited.

‘Seven... eight... nine...’ Kully muttered.

There was a brilliant blue flash and a huge bang. They craned over the

edge to see one of the robots marching spasmodically round and round in circles, jerking its probes and its antennae, while its distress signal blurted out in strangled metallic rasps.

Jame frowned. ‘Not quite enough.’ He held out another phial, Kully popped in a pill, Jamie corked the tube and flung it.

There was another explosion. This time fragments of metal flew up in the air together with a fountain of sand.

Again Kully and Jamie peered down. One Quark was scattered in pieces over the dunes. The other was wheeling crazily round on the spot, squeaking and grating with smoke pouring out of its head, its antennae hanging like rotten leaves.

‘This is fun,’ Jamie grinned.

‘Let’s do some more,’ Kully agreed.

They scrambled up and followed the clifftop until they eventually reached another of the perimeter sites. As before, two silent Quarks were guarding it

‘This is just a wee bit too easy,’ Jamie chuckled as they prepared another bomb.

Kully popped in the silver pill. ‘As easy as one... two...’

Toba was making final depth-soundings on the centre bore when he suddenly heard distant explosions and then the Quarks’ feeble distress signals. Spitting with fury, he was about order the two Quarks to disconnect from the rig and to hunt down and destroy the alien attackers, when he remembered Rago’s warning. Grinding his flinty teeth in frustration, he prepared to resume drilling.

At that moment, Rago appeared from the direction of the saucer. The expression on the Navigator’s face sent a chilly spasm through Toba’s massive frame.

‘More Quarks have been destroyed or incapacitated,’

stormed Rago accusingly.

Toba allowed himself an ironic smile. ‘You should have permitted me to destroy the primitives.’

‘Silence!’ Rago thundered. ‘We now have only eight operational

Quarks. Power levels are minimal. Report reserve status,' he ordered, turning to the Quarks.

'Two units,' bleated one.

'Five units,' bleated the other.

Rage's jaw creaked as he grimaced with rage. 'Barely sufficient to complete drilling,' he rasped. 'The rockets are installed, Toba. Inform me as soon as your operations here are concluded.'

'Command accepted.'

As the Navigator strode away, the rig blared into life again beginning the crucial final stage of the bore.

On the clifftop above, two figures knelt in the sand.

'They've started drilling again,' Jamie mouthed. 'We still have a chance...'

The sound of the drilling starting up again brought a profound sigh of relief from the Doctor as he grabbed the next plastic sheet filled with sand from Kando at the mouth of the tunnel and handed it to Zoe, who emptied it onto the huge pile growing ever larger in the middle of the shelter. At least the race to intercept the seeding trigger was not yet lost, but there was so little time left...

'How much further have you got, Teel?'the Doctor called into the vibrating darkness of the runnel.

'A little more than my own length...' came the brave young Dulcian's muffled reply.

The Doctor did a quick mental calculation and turned to Zoe. 'Still a long, long way to go...' he frowned. 'Teel, coem out and rest now. Zoe's turn.'

When Teels' feet appeared. the Doctor and Kando reached into the hole and pulled him out. The exhausted Dulcian, covered in dirt and sweat, staggered to a bench and collapsed gratefully. Armed with Jamie's dirk gripped between her teeth, be clambered into the tunnel and dragged herself into the hot, throbbing gloom by walking on her dhows and knees.

When she reached the face, she pulled the plastic sheet out of her belt

and spread it out as best she could behind her. The vibration of the drilling rig caused a constant trickle of sand to run into her eyes as she dug desperately away at the crumbling sandstone ahead, scraping the loose sand past her body and onto the sheet so that the others could empty it periodically in the shelter. The task was agonisingly slow and awkward and it was horrifying to feel that the shuddering tunnel might collapse at any moment and trap her.

Eventually she stopped to rest her aching arms a moment. All at once the tunnel shook with a series of violent shocks. Zoe's heart almost froze as the tunnel started cracking all around her.

In the shelter, the Doctor had dived for the periscope.

'Jamie and Kully have attacked the rig!' he shouted, cheering as the two Quarks careered sideways and the rig itself toppled over, belching smoke and sparks. 'Zoe, the drilling's stopped!'

'So will the tunnelling if they're not careful...' muttered Zoe, digging away again for all she was worth.

Peering through the eyepiece, the Doctor watched Rago rush into view escorted by three Quarks. Expertly he lip-read the hurried dialogue between the two Dominators.

'See what damage your "harmless" aliens are doing with their primitive explosives? Now we must surely destroy them,' Tuba insisted.

Rago flung out his huge hand. 'Replace the rig and continue. I shall personally pursue and destroy these saboteurs,' he retorted.

Seeing his revenge denied him, Toba sullenly concurred. As Rago set off towards the gorge, accompanied by the three Quarks, Toba struggled to re-position the rig over the target. The Doctor said nothing as he re-joined the others at the mouth of the tunnel, but his gentle face betrayed increasing anxiety about the fate of Jamie and the diminishing likelihood of thwarting the Dominators in their evil purpose.

Unaware of Rago's intentions, Jamie and Kully slid helter-skelter down into the canyon on their way back to the shelter. No sooner had they reached the bottom than they were dismayed to see Rago and his Quarks advancing inexorably along the floor of the canyon towards them.

Whooping with delight, Kully started preparing a bomb, but Jamie grabbed his arm and yanked him roughly back up the slope. Their progress was painfully slow as the sand gave under them, forcing them to take three steps for every one gained in height.

Rage's eyes burned with contempt as he ordered his squad to attack. Three pairs of probes were trained in deadly concentration on the desperate fugitives crawling up the slope like wasps trying to escape from a jar of treacle. Huge scars were gouged in the slopes and bluffs as the Quarks fired simultaneously, but miraculously neither was hit.

'Recharge force units,' Rago commanded. 'Report failure'

The robots whirred and sparked intermittently.

'Reserves below minima,' one of them announced.

Rago spat viciously. 'Toba is responsible for this entire fiasco. Quarks, quantise aggregate pulses. Single discharge.

Destroy them.'

Just as Jamie and Kully reached the top of the canyon, a savage tearing noise split the air around them. Kully gasped and choked and then uttered a terrible scream of agony. Jamie seized his wrist just in time to prevent him from rolling back into the gorge and hauled his dead weight up over the edge and onto the plateau.

'We're safe now, Kully...' he panted. 'the Quarks can't climb up here.'

Kully's face had gone a ghastly yellow and his teeth were chattering with shock. 'Something's happened...my arm... leg's gone cold.. can't move arm now... better leave me behind...'

Jamie put his arm protectively round Kully's paralysed shoulder. 'Nonsense. Ye'll be right as ninepence in a wee while.'

Peering over the edge, Jamie realised that Rago had ordered his Quarks to scale the longer but gentler slope at the end of the canyon. Despite their depleted power reserves, they were making good progress. If they reached the plateau, he and the wounded Dulcian had no chance at all.

Jamie quickly counted the remaining phials of chemicals stuck around the top of his sock. Then were four. 'One each...' he muttered, setting the phials upright in the sand and prising the box of silver pills out of

Kully's frozen hand. 'Hang on, Kully...' he urged, dropping a pill in each phial and frantically jamming in the stoppers.

'Four... five... six...' He picked the phials up. 'Seven...

eight...' He leaped to his feet. 'Nine...' He threw the four phials together like a brace of daggers. They flew into the canyon and landed in an arc at the feet of Rago and the Quarks.

There were four sharp thunderclaps. Jamie saw the robots scatter in all directions, reeling and tottering, their probes firing indiscriminately into the air and at each other, and their distress signals bleating feebly. Two of them blew each other up and the third almost hit Rago before bursting into flames.

'Ye'll no dominate Jamie MacCrimmon...' the young Highlander yelled down at the scorched and tattered figure lying amidst the wreckage of his Quarks.

As Rago clambered awkwardly to his feet, Jamie hoisted Kully onto his shoulders and set off across the plateau towards the clifftop that overhung the ruin.

If they met any Quarks now, they were done for...

With Kando valiantly taking her turn in the tunnel, Zoe was manning the periscope while the Doctor and Teel emptied sheetful after sheetful of sand onto the heap which was now almost touching the ceiling.

'Toba's got the drill working again,' Zoe reported. 'We can't have much time left, Doctor.'

The Doctor glanced at the mound of excavated sand.

'We must be nearly through to their shaft by now,' he murmured hopefully.

'It feels very close...' Kando reported faintly, as she pushed another load of sand towards the tunnel-opening with her feet.

'So near and yet so far...' the Doctor mused, helping Teel with the sheet.

At that moment, the trap-door thudded open and Kully suddenly sprawled onto the mound and slid stiffly to the floor. Jamie jumped in

after him and heaved the hatch shut before slithering down beside him. Briefly, Jamie explained what had happened since the intrepid pair had set out on their vital mission.

'Luckily for Kully, the Quarks' power-levels were low...'

he concluded.

Zoe and the Doctor had made the casualty as comfortable as possible in the sand.

'It's my left side... it's paralysed...' he moaned.

The Doctor gently took hold of Kully's left wrist. 'Can you move your fingers at all?' he asked.

Kully shut his eyes and screwed up his face with effort His fingertips twitched a little, then his thumb stirred.

The Doctor smiled encouragingly. 'You *are* lucky. I think it's only temporary.'

Kully managed a plucky grin. 'Don't worry about me, Doctor. What about the tunnel?' he murmured feebly.

'Thanks to you and Jamie we've almost finished it.'

Zoe gave a startled shout. 'Doctor, they've stopped drilling again!'

The Doctor rushed to the periscope just in time to see the battered figure of Rago limping up to Toba as the Quarks began dismantling the rig. Once again he deciphered their brief exchange, his own lips moving as he read theirs.

'The centre bore is completed, Navigator.'

'Good, I shall enjoy absorbing this miserable planet and its insignificant creatures, Toba. Bring the seeding trigger immediately. No more delays.'

There was just the faintest of smiles on Toba's grim visage as he glanced at his superior's undignified disarray before marching obediently away.

Jamie had already taken Kando's place at the tunnel face and he was sending out load after load of sand. 'Any sign of that bore shaft yet, Jamie?' the Doctor yelled anxiously as he returned to help the others.

‘Och no. The roof keeps caving in though...’ came the faint reply out of the foetid darkness.

They worked like beavers in the hot, stifling atmosphere of the cramped shelter, while Kully lay on the mound and kept up a brave repartee of encouragement. Hours seemed to pass, but everyone had lost all sense of time, endlessly repeating the same automatic movement, over and over again. And very soon them would be no more space in the shelter to dump the eternal flow of sand...

Then all at once Zoe grabbed the periscope handles.

‘The Dominators are coming back... they’ve got the device!’ she cried.

The Doctor dropped the heavy plastic sheet he was carrying and peered into the binocular. He watched as Toba carefully handed the seeding trigger – still in its curious spiky glass shell – to Rago. The Dominators’ faces were bathed in a lurid pink glow as they conferred over the centre bore target.

‘Recall all operational Quarks. Prepare the craft for departure and rendezvous with Fleet. Inform Fleet Leader that refuelling orbit may commence on schedule.’

‘Command accepted.’

Rago cradled the weirdly glowing device almost lovingly in his massive gloves. ‘I shall insert the seeding trigger.

You will return and synchronise the perimeter target projectiles immediately. Soon we shall see this planet and its species burst asunder.’

The Doctor’s face clouded with indignation as he mouthed the Dominator’s terrible words. He watched Toba stride purposefully away to prepare the rockets and then focused the periscope on Rago. The Navigator was pressing the tips of the bristling glass spikes in an apparently random sequence and with each movement the pink glow intensified. Eventually the glass shell came apart and Rago delicately withdrew the opalescent egg within.

‘Criticality minus beta.’

Unable to watch any longer, the Doctor closed his eyes and leaned his forehead against the periscope ‘We’re too late...’ he sighed dejectedly. ‘We’ve failed...’

‘We’re through, Doctor!’

Spinning round, the Doctor saw Jamie’s dirt-streaked smile filling the tunnel mouth.

‘Only a wee bit too far to the left,’ Jamie cried as he clambered out. ‘Not bad at all.’

The Doctor whipped back to the periscope. Rago was lending over the borehole, the seeding trigger poised in his outstretched hands.

In a single bound, the Doctor flung himself at the tunnel and vanished into the darkness.

Zoe flew to the periscope. She uttered a cry of despair.

Rago’s hands were empty. ‘It’s gone... we missed it,’ she said, trifling a sob of disappointment.

There was a long silence. Jamie, Zoe, Kando, Teel and Kully stared glumly at one another and then turned anxiously towards the tunnel.

After a while, they heard muffled mutterings and then a frantic scrambling. Gradually the Doctor emerged feet first from the narrow opening. He stood up and then turned to face the astonished group. He was holding the huge egg as though it were a bomb.

‘You did it.’ whispered Zoe.

‘So, we are saved,’ Kando burst out, with a brilliant smile.

‘Not quite saved...’ murmured the Doctor, moving in slow motion as if the slightest shock could he disastrous.’

We still have to neutralise it.’ With infinite care, he turned the glowing device over and over in his trembling hands.

Then he looked at them, appalled. ‘It’s sealed... completely sealed...’ he gasped. ‘I can’t open it.’

They all stared at him helplessly.

‘Ye mean it was all for nothing?’ Jamie exclaimed bitterly. ‘Are we going to he blown to smithereens after all?’

The Doctor nodded. ‘I’m afraid so, Jamie. Unless we can get it away from Dulkis immediately..

Teel and Kando were kneeling beside Kully. Their three faces were overcast with incredulity and anguish.

Jamie and Zoe gazed at the Time Lord with barely concealed resentment.

Suddenly the Doctor grinned mischievously.

'Whatever's the matter with you all?' he demanded, weighing the lethal object almost nonchalantly in one hand, his eyes beginning to twinkle. 'Teel and Kando, you take Kully to the capsule near the saucer, get back to the Capitol and warn them that there might be a little earthquake and a volcano or two popping up here and there. Jamie and Zoe, you go straight back to the TARDIS

and wait there for me...'

He was interrupted by a chorus of protest.

'But why? What are you going to do?' Jamie demanded.

'No time to explain now,' the Doctor cried, pushing his way through them to the periscope. 'Ah good, coast's clear at last' He at scrambled up the mound of sand under the trap-door, clutching the seeding trigger under his arm like a rugby ball.

Kully tried to get up. 'But you must come with us to the Capitol. My father will want to see you...'

'So sorry. Some other time. Got to dash...' The Doctor planted his head against the hatch and pushed it open with a crash.

'On behalf of the Dulcian crommunity...' Teel began, standing up with shy solemnity.

'Apologies. Not now. Compliments and so on to the esteemed Council...' the Doctor waved.

A moment later he was gone.

There was a stunned silence.

'Where's he gone?' Zoe asked at last.

Jame shrugged. 'Och, we'll just have to do as he says. I hope he's not up to anything too daft though...'

Inside the giant saucer, the Dominators were completing final preparations for firing the perimeter rockets and for immediate take-off from Dulkis. The control centre hummed and flickered with intense activity.

'Remaining Quarks about to board,' Toba reported.

'Particle flux?'

'Confirmed.'

'Good. Perimeter targets primed,' Rago checked.

'Seeding trigger *in situ*. Approaching criticality minus alpha,' Toba warned.

'Affirmative. Target projectile and take-off countdowns locked in sequence.'

At that moment, beneath the massive craft, a dapper figure was scurrying breathlessly up behind the last Quark as it entered the elevator at the foot of the central shaft.

Just as the access panel began to close, the figure took something out of his coat and placed it carefully on the floor of the cubicle behind the robot.

'Just a little something for the journey...' he murmured, jumping back in the nick of time as the hatch clicked shut.

Then he turned and ran away across the dunes as fast as his short legs would carry him.

High up in the control centre, Toba was monitoring the flight displays. 'Propulsion flux at optimum,' he announced.

'Initiate take-off,' Rago ordered.

A colossal shudder ran through the saucer as it wobbled and then began to rise slowly from the sand.

'Target rockets fired. All maximum penetration...' Rago reported with satisfaction. 'Seeding trigger now at critical...

at critical plus... plus...'

Toba glanced across at his superior in alarm. Rago was staring in utter

disbelief at the elevator cubicle which had just brought up the last of the Quarks.

'Toba...' Rago gasped in a hoarse nightmarish croak, pointing at the floor of the cubicle. 'Toba... abandon..

At that moment, the saucer tipped slightly and something rolled out of the cubicle and trundled noisily across the deck towards the dais. It was the seeding trigger, now glowing a deep crimson.

The Dominators gaped speechlessly at the giant egg as it zig-zagged around the gently gyrating deck, glowing brighter and hotter every second...

The vast saucer had shrieked away into the Dulcian evening sky just as Jamie reached the TARDIS, after helping Teel and Kando to carry Kully to the capsule.

'Thank goodness you're safe!' cried Zoe, meeting him in the doorway. 'But there's no sign of the Doctor yet.'

'Och, I knew I should've gone with him...' Jamie panted, shaking his head ruefully.

All at once there was a mighty roaring noise and a jet of flame erupted out of the sand nearby. They flung themselves face-down and covered their heads. After a few seconds the roaring ceased and the ground stopped shaking. A thick column of smoke and sand hung over the TARDIS. Badly shaken, they scrambled up. In the distance they could see three similar pall of smoke rising high in the air.

'They've just fired the rockets at the perimeter boreholes...' yelled a familiar voice. The Doctor came stumbling over the dunes, dusty and out of breath. 'Quick, you two – into the TARDIS!' he shouted.

'But where's that big egg thing?' Jamie asked.

'Later... later. Get inside...' the Doctor gasped as he reached them.

Jamie pushed Zoe into the dilapidated police box and followed her. 'Yon Dominators got away...' he muttered angrily.

Just as the Doctor was about to enter, a brilliant flash of incandescent white light burst over the darkening sky. He turned and paused in the doorway, a faint smile hovering over his grimy face. A few seconds later, there was a sharp crack which rumbled and echoed and re-

echoed overhead for quite some time.

The Doctor winced. ‘I think I prefer them poached myself...’ he chuckled.

Suddenly the ground started to tremble and the surrounding dunes began to undulate like waves on the sea, causing the TARDIS’s ancient woodwork to protest vociferously.

‘Doctor... come on... the whole planet’s going to blow up!’ Jamie yelled from inside.

The Doctor smiled with benign satisfaction. ‘No, no, Jamie, the planet is quite safe now,’ he called. ‘This is only a local earthquake caused by the rockets. It’ll only affect the Island, you know.’

There was a moment’s delay then Jamie appeared in the doorway next to him. ‘Aye, maybe, Doctor. But we happen to be on the island.’

At that moment, there was a terrifying tearing sound and a huge split started to open up in the dunes, belching orange sparks and sticky red lava and hissing clouds of gas and steam.

The Doctor’s eyes widened as he watched the boiling, bubbling fissure rushing hungrily towards them.

‘Oh dear,’ he mumbled, rubbing the end of his nose with a crooked finger. ‘Oh my goodness me... out of the frying pan and into the fire...’

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